





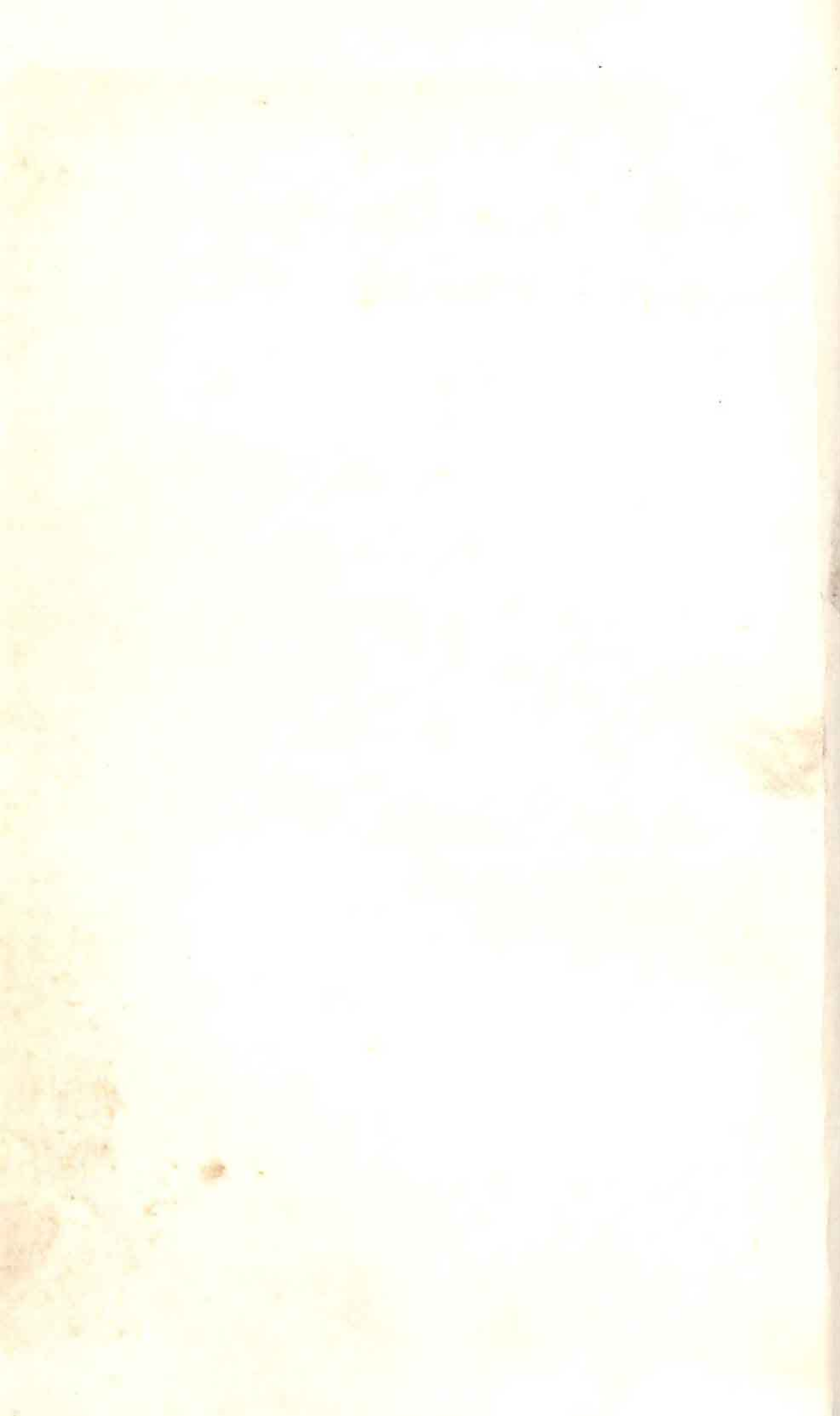






# **Mother Tongue Education**

**The West African Experience**



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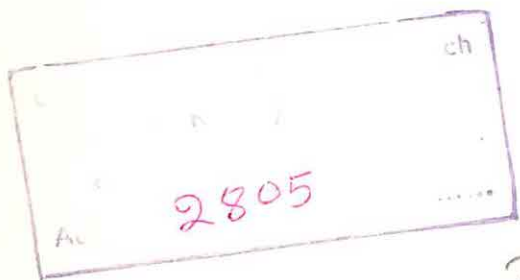
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# Preface

Language, like mathematics and aesthetics, is one of man's principal means of expression. Languages possess a formative value and, within a concept of education aiming at "learning to learn", they deserve particular attention. The degree of fluency in the language used in teaching, largely determined as it is by socio-cultural factors, has a considerable influence on school achievement.

Many countries feel that the content of education must be reformed and specifically, that language teaching must be given a more important place, its methodology be improved, and its objectives reviewed.

If language teaching is to fulfil its varied aims and if education in its entirety is to prove efficient, anthropology and language science must play their part. This involves contributing to the solution of concrete problems such as the selection of the language of instruction to be used in both school and out-of-school education and the conflicts between mother tongues and languages of instruction.

Unesco's ALSED (Anthropology and Language Science in Educational Development) programme aims at creating durable links between research workers and the potential beneficiaries of their findings and at initiating a dialogue between field-workers and decision-makers, between researchers and planners, between language scholars and the lay public and, most crucial of all, between scholars and classroom teachers. The present volume was commissioned under this programme to give scholars, educators and policy-makers concerned with mother tongue education a narrative account of developments taking place in selected countries of West Africa. Special emphasis has been placed on projects which are likely to be of interest to other countries.

Contributions were requested from Dahomey (language and education), Ghana (mother tongue education), Mali (the use of the mother tongue in adult education and mass media), Nigeria (the Six-Year Primary Project and the Rivers Readers Project), Senegal (the Wolof Project),

Sierra Leone (the use of the mother tongue in education) and Togo (mother tongue education). Unfortunately, the contributions requested from Mali, Togo and Senegal were not forthcoming.

Three broad areas are covered: (i) situations where the mother tongue has not yet been introduced into the formal school system but where preparations are being made through experimentation or development of materials in the languages concerned, as is the case in most of the French-speaking countries and in Sierra Leone; (ii) the general state of affairs where there has been a long tradition of mother tongue education, as in Ghana; and (iii) special projects, such as those listed above in Nigeria.

The volume opens with a general introduction on the role of the mother tongue in education, with particular reference to the situation in West Africa. This is followed by a historical sketch of developments in mother tongue education in the region. The contributions from Sierra Leone and Dahomey cover the first of the areas mentioned above and it is interesting to note that there is considerable similarity in the situations reported in the two countries. From Ghana comes a report covering the second area, i.e., a detailed outline of mother tongue usage in education and a critical assessment of the problems posed by policy changes and implementation. The last two reports (from Nigeria) fall into the third category. The Six-Year Primary Project is a pilot project on the use of a major language as a medium of instruction throughout primary education, while the Rivers Readers Project deals with the introduction of a number of smaller languages into the formal school system. The latter project is particularly important: it describes the implementation of a policy of utilizing languages spoken by relatively small numbers of people in education.

In view of the rapid developments taking place in education in the area, it is hoped that this volume will be the first of a series on the subject of mother tongue education in West Africa.

The designations and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Unesco Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of its frontiers. The choice of facts presented and the opinions expressed are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Unesco or of the editor.

# 1 Introduction: The Changing Role of the Mother Tongue in Education

Ayọ Bamgboṣe

## THE BEGINNINGS

Formal education in the mother tongue in West Africa began with the efforts of Christian missionaries who were anxious to spread their religion as effectively as possible by teaching people to read the scriptures in their own tongues and to show through the study and use of the African languages that those who spoke these languages were not less than human. The first school in Senegal, opened in 1817, experimented with teaching in Wolof and French.<sup>1</sup> In August 1831, the first lesson in Yoruba was given at Charlotte's Girls School, Freetown, under the direction of Mrs Hannah Kilham.<sup>2</sup>

An intensive study by missionaries of selected African languages accompanied the attempts at winning converts through literacy in the mother tongue. Notable among the early missionary linguists who pioneered such studies around the middle of the 19th century were S.W. Koelle, who worked on Kanuri and Vai, and compiled the *Polyglotta Africana* in 1854, consisting of 283 words in 156 languages; J.G. Christaller who worked on Twi,<sup>3</sup> Bishop S.A. Crowther, who worked on Yoruba, Nupe and Igbo; and J.F. Schön, who published studies on the translations of Hausa, Igbo and Mende.<sup>4</sup>

The missionary linguists' contribution to mother tongue education is impressive in two respects. First, a body of material and a ready orthography for many African languages became available through

<sup>1</sup>John Spencer, "Colonial Language Policies and their Legacies", in : Sebeok, T.A. (ed), *Current Trends in Linguistics, Vol. 7 : Linguistics in Sub-Saharan Africa*, p.537, The Hague, Mouton, 1971.

<sup>2</sup>P.E.H. Hair, *The Early Study of Nigerian Languages*, p.8, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967.

<sup>3</sup>W.E. Welmers, "Christian Missions and Language Policies" in: Sebeok, T.A. (ed.) *op. cit.*, p.564-565.

<sup>4</sup>P.E.H. Hair, *The Early Study.... op. cit.*

their work. It is customary to draw attention to the unsophisticated analysis and unscientific orthographic systems characteristic of early missionary endeavour in the field of language study. However, it must be remembered that without this material, imperfect though it is, education in the mother tongue in respect of many African languages would not have been possible at the time it was begun. Next, the missionaries, through their schools (at least in the English-speaking colonies), established the tradition of beginning education and literacy in the mother tongue, a tradition which was to persist in the educational policy of many African countries.

The missionaries did not have a free hand in the control of the system of education for long. The colonial governments intervened with their own policies. For example, in Senegal in 1829 the Governor-General instructed that "teaching must concentrate exclusively on the use of French".<sup>5</sup> Similarly, it was normal that colonial powers, in the interest of effective administration, would train some Africans in European languages "to serve as minor functionaries and interpreters";<sup>6</sup> but quite apart from this, there was the bigger issue of the fundamental attitudes of the colonizing powers. In the French and Portuguese colonies, where emphasis was placed on assimilating Africans into the civilization of the metropolitan power, the use of the mother tongue in education was prohibited and all education had to be in the relevant European language. In the British and the Belgian colonies, however, the use of the mother tongue in education was tolerated and in some cases actively encouraged.

In the British-held territories, there were constant reviews of policy. Starting with the Report of the Phelps-Stoke Commission in 1922, which recommended the use of the 'tribal language' in the lower primary classes and 'the language of the European nation in control' in the upper classes, several reports (notably those of the Advisory Committee appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies—1925, 1927, 1935, 1943) emphasized the importance of the use of the mother tongue in primary education while at the same time recognizing the role of English in both primary and post-primary education.<sup>7</sup> In general, this policy was adhered to,<sup>6</sup> but there were variations in its application. In some cases, the mother tongue was used for the first two, three or even four to five years of primary education. On the other hand, there were areas with

<sup>5</sup>John Spencer, "Colonial Language Policies...", *op. cit.*, p. 537

<sup>6</sup>John Spencer, "Colonial Language Policies...", *op. cit.*, p. 537

<sup>7</sup>B.W. Tiffen, "Language and Education in Commonwealth Africa", in : Dakin, J. et al (eds.), *Language in Education* p. 73-78 London, Oxford University Press, 1968.



several smaller languages where the mother tongue was replaced by another language spoken by a majority in the area or by English. English was generally taught as a subject in the lower primary classes and used as a medium of instruction in the upper classes.

### THE CASE FOR MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION

The idea—implicit in the policy adopted in some West African countries—that primary education is best begun in a child's mother tongue has received strong support in many educational and linguistic circles. Perhaps the first major international support for the idea emerged at the Unesco meeting of specialists in 1951. The report of this meeting was published in 1953. This meeting was of the opinion that education is best carried out in the mother tongue and recommended that "pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue" and that "the use of the mother tongue be extended to as late a stage in education as possible".<sup>8</sup> This opinion has been re-echoed many times by other meetings of experts, commissions or national bodies. For instance, the Unesco conference on 'The Use in Education of African Languages in relation to English' concluded that "Ideally, the medium of instruction for a child living in its own language environment should be the mother tongue" and that children should be educated in the mother tongue for as long as possible.<sup>9</sup> The Meeting of the Unesco advisory group of consultants on 'The Role of Linguistics and Sociolinguistics in Language Education and Policy' (28 February 1972) re-iterated the basic position of the 1953 Report and went on to assert that "teaching at least initial literacy in the mother tongue may be advisable even in situations where the scanty number of speakers appears not to warrant the large-scale production of educational materials".<sup>10</sup> The Nigerian National Curriculum Conference held in 1969 declared that the Nigerian primary school child "should be well-grounded in his mother tongue".<sup>11</sup>

However, this same idea has been criticized by those who are particularly conscious of the multiplicity of African languages and the need for a language of widespread use to cope with the demands of modern development and internal communication. Three major objections have been

<sup>8</sup>UNESCO, *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*, Report of the Unesco Meeting of Specialists (1951), Monographs on Fundamental Education VIII, p. 47-8, Paris, Unesco, 1953.

<sup>9</sup>B.W. Tiffen, *op. cit.*, p. 83-84

<sup>10</sup>UNESCO, "The Role of Linguistics and Sociolinguistics in Language Education and Policy", p. 11, ED/WS/286, Paris, Unesco, 1972.

<sup>11</sup>A. Adaralegbe, (Ed), *A. Philosophy for Nigerian Education* (Proceedings of the Nigerian National Curriculum Conference 8-12 September 1969), p. 214, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1972.

raised to the use of the mother tongue in early education.

(i) If it is educationally and psychologically a sound policy this has not been substantiated by experimentation.

(ii) As an idea, it is impracticable because of the large number of minority languages in which literacy work is bound to be uneconomical.

(iii) The undoubted need for a language of wider communication such as English and French will necessarily restrict the scope of education in the mother tongue.

It is true that not many experiments can be cited in support of the use of the mother tongue as opposed to a second language, but this does not mean that there have been none. One of the best-known is the Iloilo experiment\* which clearly demonstrated the superiority of starting off with the mother tongue. The conclusion at the end of the second year was that "the local vernacular, Hiligaynon, is a much more effective medium of instruction in the first two primary grades than English," at the end of the third year "the experimental group continued to surpass the control group" thereby proving that "the superiority of the vernacular medium of instruction remained in spite of change in the medium of instruction to English".<sup>12</sup> An experiment in Ghana showed that primary school children had a higher vocabulary in the mother tongue than in English, thereby indicating that, for these children, English would be a most inefficient medium of instruction.<sup>13</sup>

Other experiments have produced the opposite conclusion. For instance, the results from the Iganga experiment in Uganda in which two classes were taught geography, one in English and the other in its mother tongue, the former class performed better than the latter.

This type of conflicting evidence led Dakin to conclude that "the evidence about the difficulties of a foreign medium at the school stage thus seems inconclusive. The superiority of the mother tongue has not been everywhere demonstrated."<sup>14</sup>

In the light of the foregoing, the Six-Year Primary Project\* now under way in the Western State of Nigeria becomes very important. It involves the use of a mother tongue, Yoruba, as a medium of instruction for the full six years of primary education, with English taught as a subject by specialist teachers.

\* See: Pedro T. Orata, 'The Iloilo Experiment in Education through the Vernacular', in: Unesco, *The Use of Vernacular .... op. cit.*  
*ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, *The Use of Vernacular... op. cit.*, p. 127-128

<sup>13</sup> Julian Dakin, "Language and Education in India" in: Dakin, J. et. al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 26

<sup>14</sup> Julian Dakin, J. al. (eds.) : *op. cit. ibid.* p. 27.

\* See Chapter 6



It is interesting to observe that the concept of a six-year course through the medium of the mother tongue was foreshadowed in 1943 in a memorandum on language in African school education where it was stated that it "is surely unquestionable that in a school course of six years the instruction must be given entirely through the medium of the vernacular".<sup>15</sup> What was then merely an assertion is now being tried out and subjected to objective evaluation.

Another type of experiment which ought to shed some light on the problem of initial literacy and primary education in a multi-lingual setting is a comparison of two parallel classes: one taught in the mother tongue initially and another taught in a foreign language such as English or French from the beginning of primary education. There are, of course, examples of both practices at work. For example, initial literacy in the mother tongue is the policy in many parts of Nigeria and Ghana, while initial literacy in French is the policy in many of the French-speaking countries.<sup>16</sup> Initial literacy in English is the policy in Sierra Leone and has been tried at one time or another in schools in Ghana and Northern Nigeria. What is now needed is a controlled experiment in which the two systems are compared. It is impossible to compare pupils in and leaving special nursery and primary schools in urban areas (i.e. in Nigeria) which do not use the mother tongue as a medium with those in and leaving ordinary schools which use vernaculars because the former are fee-paying schools and hence better-staffed and better equipped than the latter.

Whatever the outcome of any experiments in this field, the view is now widely accepted that a child who comes to school with a language of his own and is then introduced to literacy and/or learning in another language is bound to have problems which are different from those of a child who is taught in his own tongue. In the French-speaking West African countries where French is still the medium of instruction from the beginning of primary education, greater attention is now being paid to the production of materials which take into account the special problems of the child whose mother tongue is not French.<sup>17</sup>

The view that education is best started in a child's mother tongue is often criticized on the grounds that it is hardly possible to cater for

<sup>15</sup>B.W. Tiffen, *op. cit.*, p. 77

<sup>16</sup>As Alexandre has correctly observed, the terms 'French-speaking', 'English-speaking' applied to African countries are misnomers since "probably more than 90 per cent of today's Africans have no command whatsoever of either language". See Pierre Alexandre, "Multilingualism" in: Sebeok, T.A. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 654.

<sup>17</sup>Such materials have been developed by the Centres or Institutes of Applied Linguistics in Dakar, Abidjan and Yaoundé.

education in all the mother tongues. Thus, Bull asserts that "it may be profoundly distasteful to abandon the principle of linguistic self-determination, but it is apparent that the vast enterprises required to provide a modern education and to sustain a modern state cannot be carried out in excessively polyglot societies". Hence, he concludes that "speakers of many vernacular languages are doomed to kind of intellectual colonialism" and that in place of "more education in more vernaculars, it would seem more practical to formulate a long-range educational program aimed at a gradual reduction in the number of languages and dialects in every area of the world".<sup>18</sup>

It is true that the existence of several languages with a small number of speakers is bound to pose certain problems with respect to availability of materials, teachers or even orthographies. For instance, there are "34 distinct, mutually-unintelligible indigenous languages" in Ghana and that although one of these languages, Twi-Fante, is spoken by 2,657,000 people, as many as ten are spoken by fewer than 10,000 each, including Vagala (2,230), Logba (2,090) and Akposo (1,780).<sup>19</sup> What is to be done in the case of such minority languages? It is tempting to try to ignore them, but these smaller languages combined can add up to a considerable number of speakers. Thus, Ghana with a population of 6,726,820, has a minority language population of 2,022,550 for whose languages there are no available teaching materials.<sup>20</sup> It is completely unjustifiable to ignore such a large minority.

Despite these problems, one simply cannot accept a counsel of despair such as Bull's. In fact, there is some evidence that the problems involved in using certain of the smaller languages in literacy are not as formidable as was previously imagined. The Rivers Readers Project in Nigeria which is designed to provide initial literacy and early primary education in the mother tongue in over twenty languages/dialects of the area has shown that, with groups of interested scholars and teachers working as a team supported by inexpensive standard primers, the cost of providing initial literacy in the mother tongue in limited usage languages is certainly

<sup>18</sup>W.E. Bull, "The Use of Vernacular Languages in Fundamental Education" (A review of UNESCO, *The Use of Vernacular... op. cit.*) in: Hymes, D. *Language and Culture in Society*, p. 529, New York, Harper & Row, 1964.

<sup>19</sup>D.R. Smock, "Language Policy and Nation Building in Ghana", September, 1970. (mimeographed)

<sup>20</sup>Jean Ure, "Mother Tongue Education and Minority Languages: A Question of values and costs", 1972. (mimeographed). A case for the inclusion of more of the smaller Ghanaian languages in the school syllabus is made by E.O. Apronti and A.C. Denteh, "Minority Languages", in: Birnie, J.R., and Ansre, G. (eds.), *The Study of Ghanaian Languages*, p. 18-23, Legon, Accra, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1969.

easier than was previously imagined.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, a lot more could be done for the so-called minority languages.

When everything possible has been done, it may well be that a few language groups will remain for whom initial literacy in their own languages is not feasible (for instance, in the case of a language with under 2,000 speakers). What is to be done in such cases? The solution proposed in the 1953 report of the Unesco meeting of specialists is that "the language spoken by the largest populations or having the most developed literature or the greatest number of teachers" may have to be used, or alternatively, it may be necessary "to concentrate almost exclusively for a time on the teaching of the second language as a subject, in order to use it very soon as a medium of instruction".<sup>22</sup> This solution is usually adopted in practice. For example, Hausa used to be employed for initial literacy in many parts of Northern Nigeria, where the language was generally spoken as a second language, while in the Benue-Plateau State of Nigeria, where there is a multiplicity of languages, English is the medium of instruction from the earliest classes of the primary school.

One important point which is often glossed over is that speakers of the smaller languages quite often strive to acquire a second language spoken by a larger number of people. This is the case with Hausa in parts of Northern Nigeria and Yoruba in certain parts of the Mid-West State of Nigeria. An important study on the expansion of Wolof in Senegal shows the way speakers of other languages are embracing a widely-spoken one. About 15 per cent of the school children who speak Wolof at home have parents neither of whom is a native speaker of Wolof. The facility with which many people pick up additional languages is also sometimes underrated: in the Madina village in Accra where over 80 different languages are spoken as a mother tongue, 70 per cent of the inhabitants claim competence in three or more languages.

In the residual cases, therefore, although the use of a language other than the child's mother tongue is certainly not the ideal, the use of another language which he already speaks as a second language is to be preferred to that of a language completely foreign to his community.

The need for a language of wider communication such as English or French is sometimes given as a reason for restricting the scope of education in the mother tongue. This attitude is typified by the following comment by Tiffen:

<sup>21</sup>See Chapter 7 and R.G. Armstrong, "Language Policies and Language Practices in West Africa", in: Fishman, J.A. et al (eds.), *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, p. 234, New York, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1968.

<sup>22</sup>UNESCO, *The Use of Vernacular... op. cit.*, p. 51

"More recently, however, doubts have arisen as to the value of the mother tongue policy. Is there any point in educating children in the vernacular at the beginning if they have to be educated in English after a few years anyway? Why not go straight for English? Teaching a language as a subject, rather than using it as a medium, does not usually give the necessary mastery.....many educationists have come to believe that the answer to the language problem in African schools lies in using English as a medium as early as possible, if not right from the very beginning of a child's school career."<sup>23</sup>

The Commonwealth Conference on 'The Teaching of English as a Second Language' held at Makerere, Uganda, in 1961, recommended that English "should be introduced as early as possible in the child's school life" and concluded that where a community "has decided to participate as speedily as possible in the technological and other advantages of a wider society, a decision to use English as a medium is likely to be inevitable, and the pressure to introduce it early may well be heavy."<sup>24</sup>

It is true that, for a number of cogent reasons, almost all West African countries need a language of wider communication such as English or French. But one must not be overawed by what has been called the "catechetical litany" of the assumed functions of these languages.<sup>25</sup> A point which is often ignored is that English and French are minority languages in the countries in which they are spoken, those who speak them forming up to 10 per cent of the total population. If education through the school system is not designed simply to replenish the ranks of the educated elite, it is obvious that something will have to be done for the large majority who have no opportunity of going to school or who drop out of the school system before they have had a chance to master the magic second language. This is why education in the mother tongue cannot be neglected—for the majority of the population, it will be the only passport to literacy.

<sup>23</sup>B.W. Tiffen, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84-85.

<sup>25</sup>In a critical article, Pio Zirimu questions the assumption that African languages necessarily have to play second fiddle to the so-called languages of wider communication and refers to the "catechetical litany" which runs as follows: "English and French are international languages, the languages of science and technology, of commerce and industry, of higher education and universal culture—in short, the languages of education, development and international communication. Moreover these languages being foreign and therefore neutral, and being institutionalized through formal education, will unite us. Native languages cannot claim to perform the same functions, and must therefore take second place, and be used in those areas where we cannot do better for the time being....." See Pio Zirimu, "Second Languages in Africa", *Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Eastern Africa Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 5, May, 1969.

## CURRENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The use or non-use of the mother tongue in education generally depends on the language policy of the country concerned. However, three important factors must be noted about language policies in many African countries.

### *LANGUAGE POLICIES ARE RARELY STATED EXPLICITLY.*

Since language policies often have political repercussions, it is not surprising that they are often vaguely indicated. This situation could be a blessing in disguise in the sense that it means that no rigid rules are laid down in matters of detail. For example, in a country or state where the use of the mother tongue is allowed in literacy and/or primary education, it is advantageous that such a policy does not go on to indicate which languages are to be used and which are not. On the other hand, where there is vagueness or indecision concerning fundamental aspects of policy (for instance, whether the mother tongue is to be used and if so, at what level), serious problems could arise leading to lack of uniformity, frustration on the part of the teachers and lack of direction. Perhaps the best way of pin pointing the language policy of a state or country is to observe what actually goes on in the system.

### *LANGUAGE POLICIES TEND TO FLUCTUATE*

Fluctuation in language policies could be due to a number of factors, ranging from a change in attitude arising from the adoption of a new philosophy to a change in those responsible for making policy. In Ghana, the stated policy in 1951 on the language of instruction primary school was that of a gradual transition from the 'vernacular' to English in the second year of the primary school. By 1960, only the first year of the primary school was supposed to be taught in the mother tongue. Yet the Minister of Education is reported to have said in 1963 that the Government insisted, conditions permitting that English should be used by both teachers and pupils right from the first year, adding that some experimental schools had been opened "to test the efficacy of using English as the only medium of instruction right from the first year". In 1968, a Government White Paper stated that official policy was "that a Ghanaian language should be used in the first year, and that a gradual change to English as the medium of instruction should begin in the second year . . .", a return to the 1960 policy. In 1972, a spokesman for the Ghana Ministry of Education defined policy as "the teaching of English in all classes and its use as the medium of instruction in all

<sup>26</sup>See Smock, D.R., *op. cit.*



classes save the first three".<sup>27</sup>

In Northern Nigeria, under the colonial regime, the policy was to use Hausa as the medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school in most parts of the region. With the coming of independence and the realization of the overwhelming need for English, the policy was changed to what came to be known as "straight for English" i.e. the use of English as a medium as from the earliest class possible. In May 1967, six states were created out of the Northern Region; in the years that followed, a reversal of this policy has taken place in some of the states. For instance, the North Western State now prescribes Hausa for the first two years,<sup>28</sup> and the North Central State for the first four years, while Kano State recently announced its intention to change Hausa in the lower classes of the primary school.

#### *THERE IS OFTEN AN INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE*

Inconsistency between policy and practice may arise from difficulties in carrying out the stated policy. For example, although the policy in the Western State of Nigeria is that the medium of instruction should change from Yoruba to English at the end of the third year of the primary school, the mother tongue continues to be used freely in many schools, especially those in the rural areas, because of the pupils' inadequate level of competence in English. On the other hand, in some urban schools where there is a mixture of different language groups, English often becomes the medium of instruction much earlier than laid down by official policy.

A glaring example of inconsistency between policy and practice is that reported by the Barnard Committee in Ghana which found in 1956 that, contrary to Government policy that English should be introduced in the second year of the primary school, 76 per cent of the primary schools reviewed did not use English as the medium of instruction at any level.<sup>29</sup>

One aspect of the divergence between policy and practice occurs at individual level. Many members of the educated elite in the English-

<sup>27</sup>Consultation on Language Policies of West African Countries, 27, 28 March 1972, *Report on First Session: Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast*, Legon, Ghana, (mimeographed).

<sup>28</sup>The reintroduction of Hausa into the school syllabus is described as "one of the highlights of the 1972/73 financial year budget" for the North Western State. According to a report in the *Nigerian Daily Times* of 25 April 1972 (p.16), the Governor of the state also announced that Hausa would be taught up to the School Certificate level and in Teachers' Colleges and that, in relation to employment, similar recognition would be given to diplomas or degrees in Hausa and in English or French.

<sup>29</sup>Smock, D.R., *op. cit.*

speaking West African countries who take part in the formulation of policy are loudest in praising the virtues of education in the mother tongue. Yet, when it comes to sending their children to school, they settle for the special private schools where English and French are taught (but not the mother tongue), if they cannot afford the expense of a public school education in Britain. It is a fundamental human right for anyone to be able to educate his children in the best way possible; therefore, there should be no question of dealing with this problem by abolishing private schools. Yet, the inequality arising from this situation is obvious. For the majority of the population, there is no alternative to the ordinary, government-run schools. The answer lies in making such schools good enough to compete with the private schools which are generally better equipped and better staffed. Proof that parents will prefer the best schools whether fee-paying or not is that there are a few very good government-run schools in some of the cities (in Nigeria, for example) which are as much in demand as the private schools.

The most important factor as far as policy is concerned is that in all the independent states of West Africa English or French is the official language. The implication of this policy for mother tongue education is that the African languages necessarily have to play a secondary role. The medium of instruction in secondary and higher education has to be and is the official language. This leaves two possible roles for the mother tongue: as a medium of instruction at primary level and as a subject at one or more levels of education. So far, except for the Ifè experiment, there is no current case of the use of the mother tongue throughout primary school.

Most West African countries do not use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the primary school level. The notable exceptions are Ghana and Nigeria, which have a long tradition of mother tongue education, at least in the initial stages of primary school, and Togo, which is reported to have a policy of emphasizing four languages, using them as media of instruction.<sup>30</sup>

The countries that use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction also have a policy of teaching it as a subject at primary school level. At secondary school level, only Ghana and Nigeria have a policy of teaching the mother tongue as a subject. In Ghana, four languages (Ewe, Fante, Ga and Twi) are available at the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) and in Nigeria, Efik, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are available at the same level. There are plans to introduce Advanced Level

<sup>30</sup>Consultation on Language Policies of West African Countries, *Report on the first Session...*, *op. cit.*



examinations in most of these languages very soon. This means that schools will now be able to continue the teaching of the languages as a subject beyond the end of the five-year secondary school course. Excluding the use of the mother tongue as an illustration of linguistic analysis and as a special paper in a linguistics programme (which can be found in many universities that have a language or linguistics programme), the teaching of the mother tongue at university level as a subject in its own right only flourishes in Nigeria where degree courses are available in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

The only area in which the use of the mother tongue in education has come to be accepted by many countries is in the realm of adult education. Even those countries with a policy of not allowing the use of the mother tongue in the school system often recognize that eradication of illiteracy is best tackled through a literacy programme based on the mother tongue. Thus, in Senegal, there is a literacy programme under the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Adult Education and teaching materials have already been produced in Wolof, Fula and Serer. In Sierra Leone\*, the mother tongues of the country, particularly Mende and Temne, are used extensively for literacy work. Liberia adheres rigidly to English in the school system, but uses mother tongues as a bridge in literacy campaigns.<sup>31</sup>

Increasing attention is being paid to the concept of functional literacy, that is, to the idea that it is not enough to teach an adult to read, count, and write; literacy programmes should help him to fit better into the social, economic and political life of his community or society, to become a better citizen and a better farmer, trader or craftsman.<sup>32</sup> Many of the countries engaged in literacy programmes are incorporating the functional element into their programmes. For example, literacy materials have been devised in Yoruba by the Department of Adult Education at the University of Ibadan for tobacco growers in Western Nigeria. A rather ambitious example of functional literacy in action is the rural mobilization pro-

<sup>31</sup>UNESCO, *The Use of Vernacular... op. cit.*, p.20. For an account of the use of the mother tongue in literacy in African countries see P.J. FOSTER, "Problems of Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa" in: Sebeok, T.A. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.603-605.

\*See chapter 3.

<sup>32</sup>A. Babs Farunwa, *New Perspectives in African Education*, p. 159, Lagos, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1967.

<sup>33</sup>At the Consultation on Language Policies of West Africa held at the University of Ghana, Legon, in March 1972, Mr. Daouda Thiero of Mali gave a report on the operation of this scheme and exhibited some of the materials being used. The range of activities covered by the materials produced in the functional literacy programme in Mali is given by Mr. Kone in an interview with *Dossiers Pédagogiques*, vol. 1, no. 2, November-December 1972, p.36.

gramme in Mali which involves the production and use of materials in Bambara (including a periodical) on different aspects of life in the country such as health, irrigation, farming, etc. The idea is to teach illiterate citizens to read and write and make available materials which will help them better perform their role in society.<sup>33</sup>

The major problem facing most literacy programmes in West Africa is that of inadequate resources. The reason is not far to seek. All the governments spend a large part of their budget on education from primary to university level. The amounts remaining for literacy programmes are generally inadequate. As a result, these programmes tend to be run on a shoe string with volunteer or poorly-paid teachers. The dearth of follow-up reading materials can be attributed partly to inadequate financial resources, sometimes to the absence of a literary tradition in the language. Even the latter problem could be overcome if sufficient financial resources were available. Ultimately, therefore, the problem boils down to one of providing adequately for the programme.

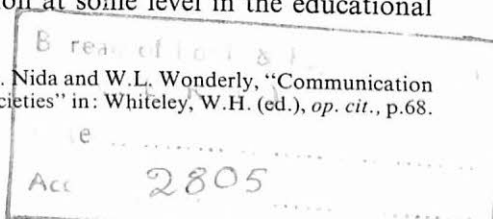
The point has often been made that literacy in terms of simply being able to read elementary primers is meaningless.<sup>34</sup> Reasonable follow-up material is necessary to prevent newly literate adults from lapsing back into illiteracy. The existence of this reading material (for example, newspapers) is also an incentive for adults to become literate. Thus literacy programme planners should pay serious attention to this aspect of their work.

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

The current situation with regard to mother tongue usage in education, taken at its face value, does not appear to be encouraging. But there are a number of factors at work which could lead to changes in the coming years. First, the policy of teaching English or French to African children as though they spoke no other language before coming to school is being questioned more and more and mother tongues are being taken into consideration in the preparation of teaching materials even when the medium of instruction remains English or French. Second, some West African governments have made clear their intention to introduce the mother tongue into education at some point in the future. Such governments include Senegal, Sierra Leone and some state governments in Nigeria. Third, even where there are no immediate plans for mother tongue education, there is some evidence that there will be pressure on governments to move in this direction at some level in the educational

<sup>34</sup>See P.J. Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 607 and E.A. Nida and W.L. Wonderly, "Communication Roles of Languages in Multilingual Societies" in: Whiteley, W.H. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.68.

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system.<sup>35</sup> Finally, linguistic research in West Africa in the last ten years has made available descriptions of many languages, some of which had been previously unwritten; literacy work in the mother tongue is therefore unlikely to be impeded merely by lack of orthographies for and adequate descriptions of some languages.

The future of mother tongues in education should be regarded in terms of their three roles: media of instruction, subjects at the post-primary levels and means of eradicating illiteracy.

#### *AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION*

Two aspects of this role may be considered: the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school and its use throughout primary education.

Given the factors outlined above, it is likely that more and more countries or states will introduce the mother tongue, in the early years of primary education at least, as a bridge between the language of the home and the foreign language which is going to become the medium of instruction at some point in the primary school. In Senegal, for example, the government has promulgated a decree on the transcription of the national languages (Wolof, Serer, Fula, Diola, Malinke, Soninke). The preamble to this decree states that the government has taken this step in order to introduce the national languages into education in Senegal from the primary school to the university, that a sound education should begin in the mother tongue and that the objective should be to teach each child to write his own mother tongue. The government realizes that such a major step would have to be carefully planned. Thus, it proposes to encourage the necessary basic research on the languages, to introduce the languages concerned into the teacher training colleges and to experiment with one or two hours of instruction per week.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Such pressures are evident in the activities of some groups and individuals. For example, in January 1972 in Dahomey, a group of linguists formed a body called the "Commission Nationale Dahoméenne de Linguistique" with Mr. O. Yai as its Secretary General. This body has as one of its principal objectives the scholarly study of the Dahomean languages with a view to their use in initial literacy for school children and in adult literacy. Also, in a contribution entitled "Les Problèmes de Multilinguisme au Cameroun" to *Dossiers Pédagogiques* vol. 1, May–August, 1973, p. 38–40, Professor M.H. Bôt Ba Njock of the University of Cameroun, Yaoundé, gives as one of the objectives of preparing a linguistic map of the country the provision of detailed and objective information about all its languages. Such information could form the basis for political decisions about the introduction of the local languages into education, decisions which politicians are usually reluctant to make because of the possible repercussions of choosing some languages rather than others.

<sup>36</sup>Republic of Senegal, *Transcription des Langues Nationales*, April, 1972 (Decree no. 71-566 of 21 May 1971), p. 9–11.



Already research institutes have accepted the challenge. The Wolof Project at the Centre de Linguistique Appliquée in Dakar, involving the collection of a corpus of 500,000 words from which a basic 3000-word vocabulary will emerge, is designed to help in preparing material for literacy programmes and to facilitate teaching Wolof.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, linguists at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) have devised primers and other teaching material for introducing Wolof in the early stages of the primary school. However, because of governmental caution, they have not been able to make a trial test of the material. The Minister of Education takes the view that such material is best tested initially outside the school system (for example, with children who for one reason or another are not able to go to school). The linguists, on the other hand, want ideal conditions for making the trial test in order to be able to assess objectively the effectiveness of their material and the idea of teaching in the mother tongue as compared with the current practice of teaching in French.<sup>38</sup> When this seeming impasse is resolved, the teaching of Wolof at the initial stages of primary education should become a reality.

The introduction of the mother tongue into primary education will probably be an accomplished fact in the next decade in most of the countries that now have a rigid policy of French or English teaching only. Countries which already have a policy of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, i.e. Nigeria and Ghana, are likely to continue.

The second aspect of the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction is its expansion beyond the lower to the upper classes of primary school. At the moment, the Ifè experiment is the only example of such a possibility. There are plans to extend the scope of the experiment in order to involve many more schools. If the experiment succeeds and the government of the Western State of Nigeria can be persuaded to adopt the policy, it is possible that Yoruba will ultimately become the medium of instruction in all the primary schools in the State's public education system. On the other hand, it must be pointed out that the use of a mother tongue as a medium throughout primary education is perhaps going to be feasible only for the major languages in each country or state. In the foreseeable future, therefore, this type of expansion of mother tongue education is likely to be limited in scope.

<sup>37</sup>M. Calvet, "The Elaboration of Basic Wolof" in: Whiteley, W.H. (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 274-287.

<sup>38</sup>Information obtained through interviews with the linguists concerned at IFAN and the Honourable Minister of Education, Mr. Seck. It is interesting to note that a mimeographed journal in Wolof entitled *Kaddu*, edited by Ousmane Sembene and Pathé Diagne, is now available in Senegal.

*AS A SUBJECT BEYOND PRIMARY LEVEL*

Considering the amount of linguistic research that has been going on in the field of African languages, it is not unlikely that studies in selected mother tongues will be introduced into more universities in due course. The Department of Linguistics at the University of Ghana already has plans to begin teaching full degree courses in Akan, and even in Senegal where it is not yet considered opportune to introduce mother tongue education into the school system, it seems that such teaching could be introduced even now at university level.<sup>39</sup> It may seem paradoxical, but it is not unlikely that the impetus for introducing mother tongue teaching at the lower levels will filter down from the top of the educational system.

At the secondary school level, it is difficult to foresee any changes from the status quo. The proposed introduction of the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) examination in some Nigerian and Ghanaian languages should become a reality in the next few years, but this is the most one can expect in the immediate future. The introduction of the mother tongue as a subject at secondary school level cannot take place unless the language is already being taught as a subject at primary school level. Therefore, until the situation at the latter level changes, no change can be expected at secondary school level.

*IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMMES*

Eradication of illiteracy is becoming a major concern of many developing countries. The illiterate population comprises adult illiterates who have not had the opportunity of formal education, children who have not been able to go to school and drop-outs from school who have become illiterate again. It is estimated that more than 80 per cent of all African children do not receive any formal education and that in some countries the percentage of children of school age actually enrolled in the schools is as low as 2 per cent.<sup>40</sup> Available figures for illiterates in some West African countries illustrate the enormity of the problem: Liberia 91.1 per cent, Niger 99.1 per cent, Nigeria 88.5 per cent, Senegal 94.5 per cent.<sup>41</sup>

It has been shown that there is a high degree of correlation between "mass illiteracy and underdevelopment". Eradication of illiteracy is therefore seen as a necessary condition for rapid economic development.

Given the basic position that eradication of mass illiteracy is best effected through literacy in the mother tongue, it follows that much more effort

<sup>39</sup>Republic of Senegal, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup>N. Denny, "Languages and Education in Africa" in: Spencer, John, *Language in Africa*, p. 41, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1963.

<sup>41</sup>P.J. Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 588.



than hitherto expended will have to go into literacy work. The figures for literacy classes in the Western State of Nigeria in table 1 (which are probably the highest for any state in the country) lead to three observations. First, they show that the pace of literacy is rather slow. At the rate of under 8,000 a year, it will take hundreds of years to make the whole population literate. Next, they reveal that there is a high drop-out/failure rate in the courses. Only about 50 per cent of those enrolled eventually obtain literacy certificates. Finally, they show that the honorarium paid to the teachers is rather low—about two shillings per student per year! This situation, which is probably quite typical of many countries or states in West Africa, will have to be rectified if any meaningful progress is to be expected in the field of adult literacy.

Table 1

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| No. enrolled   | 14,981 |
| No. finished course                                  | 10,955 |
| No. sat tests  | 9,359  |
| No. awarded certificates                             | 7,686  |
| Total Honoraria paid (in Nigerian pounds) 1,493:6s:— |        |

Source: Annual Abstract of Education Statistics, p. 75-76 vol. VII, 1967.

One factor which might encourage further literacy work, or even its introduction where it does not at the moment exist, is the availability of analyses and descriptions of more languages (especially the smaller languages) arising from the work of the universities, research institutes, learned societies (such as the West African Linguistic Society) and other organizations. One such organization to which particular reference will be made here is the Institute of Linguistics. According to its 1972 annual report, the institute is currently engaged in research in 47 languages in West Africa with a view to writing, testing and producing primers (based on a practical orthography worked out in consultation with interested officials), training selected native speakers to write original material, publishing follow-up reading material and training teachers to ensure continuation of the literacy programme. With the efforts of this and similar bodies, starting a literacy programme need not be as difficult or expensive as formerly imagined. Community effort could

also be tapped. For example, there are local language committees in some areas which are keenly interested in developing their languages and willing to contribute in practical terms to efforts being made by the government and its agencies.

In view of the realization of the increasing importance of adult literacy in most African countries, it is to be expected that the current efforts will be intensified. The scale of whatever expansion takes place will depend to a large extent on the relative importance given to adult literacy vis-a-vis literacy and education through the school system. In fairness to the greater majority of the population for whom adult literacy is the only type of formal education possible, it is to be hoped that the balance will not be tilted too adversely against investment in adult education.



## 2 Mother Tongue Education in West Africa: A Historical Background

Timothy A Awoniyi

This chapter is a broad attempt at collating and interpreting available data on the origins and trends of mother tongue education in West Africa. The area is studied in three zones—the English-speaking (Anglophone) countries—Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Liberia and Nigeria; the French-speaking (Francophone) countries—Cameroon, Dahomey, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Mali, the Niger, Senegal, Togo, the Upper Volta and Mauritania; and the Portuguese-speaking Guinea-Bissau and the Spanish Colony of Fernando Po. (See Map on page 28)

For purposes of clarity, a number of terms should perhaps first be defined. The term 'mother tongue', rather than the term 'vernacular', is preferred here because the latter sometimes denotes an inferior local language relative to the language spoken by the dominant European power. In fact, 'vernacular' has been defined as "a language which is the mother-tongue of a group which is socially or politically dominated by another group speaking a different language....."<sup>1</sup> Such a definition is emotive and subjective. The mother tongue is taken here to mean the language which a group of people, considered to be the inhabitants of an area, acquire in their early years and which normally becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication.<sup>2</sup>

In West Africa, however, some mother tongues such as Hausa or Mende have gradually assumed the status of a *lingua franca*.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, the *lingua franca* may also be the mother tongue of one of the groups. In fact, many West Africans are bilingual or multilingual in some West

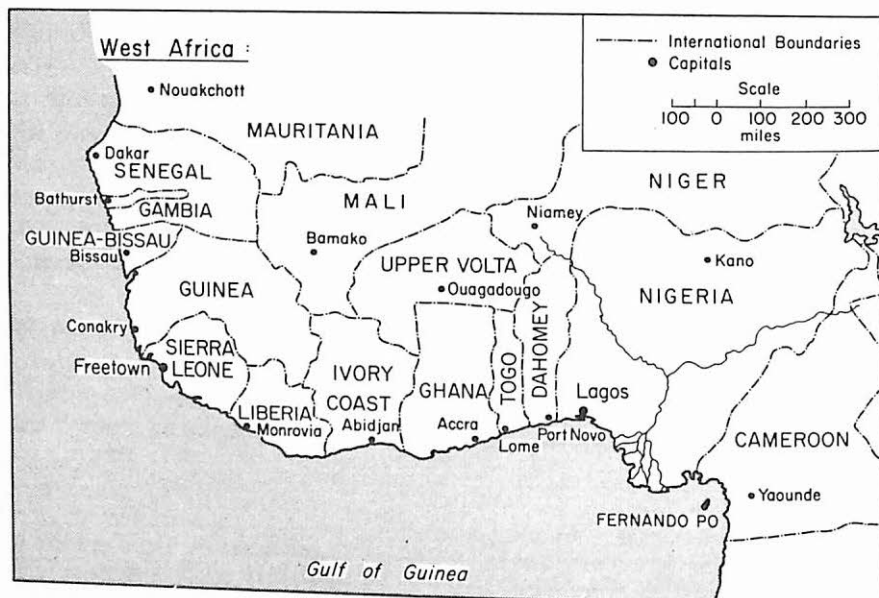
<sup>1</sup>Unesco, *The Use of Vernacular... op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup>Sam F. Cheavens, *Vernacular Languages and Education*, p. 8, 9. The University of Texas, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1957. (Ph.D. Thesis).

<sup>3</sup>A *lingua franca* has been defined as "a common language which is habitually used as a medium of communication between groups of people whose mother tongues are different". See Bernd Heine, *Status and Use of African Lingua Franca*, p. 15, 145, 151, Munich, Ifo-Institut Für Wirtschaftsforschung München Afrika—Studienstelle, Weltforum Verlag, 1970.

African mother tongues. The introduction of the formal school system into West Africa by the European colonizing powers and the impact of Islam have led to mother tongues such as French, English and Arabic becoming the *lingua franca* of some West African communities. Consequently, some West Africans have become bilingual or multilingual in their mother tongues as well as in one or more non-West African languages. In spite of the complex linguistic situation, many West Africans who have not been influenced by Islam or by the formal school system, remain monolingual.

The term 'education' indicates, first, informal, and second, formal education. Informal education is synonymous with traditional education which conserves and transmits the culture, traditions, and experiences of a particular society. On the other hand, formal education is systematic or organized schooling in planned institutions of learning at all levels. Mother tongue education in West Africa should be looked at within the context of formal and informal education, though the emphasis in this article will be on the employment or otherwise of the mother tongues in the process of formal schooling with such languages functioning as media of instruction and/or taught as subjects within the curricular experiences of the learners.



Though formal schooling with its implications for the variety of functions expected of the mother tongues is a relatively recent educational phenomenon, it must be emphasized that mother tongues played signific-

ant roles in preliterate West Africa. This factor will be examined briefly within the context of traditional informal education.

Traditional education in West Africa existed for many centuries before any contact with Europeans and the 'formal' school system took place. Such traditional systems of education are flexible enough to promote the enrichment of the traditions and cultures of the peoples of West Africa and to transmit the cultural heritage from generation to generation through the vehicle of communication i.e. the mother tongues.<sup>4</sup>

As children observe the techniques and skills as well as the habits of their elders and parents, systematic instruction in the local languages is given. Stories, songs, myths, legends, dancing, specific instruction, and so on are all combined to stimulate children's emotions, quicken their perception and guide them as they explore, exploit, and interpret their natural environment.

On a wider scale, the mother tongues, though unwritten, were significant in the socio-political systems which rose and fell in West Africa.<sup>5</sup> Initiation ceremonies, traditional occupational guidance, traditional medicine practices, 'diplomatic' relationships and trade had perhaps their most impressive medium in the local languages. In fact, some mother tongues such as Hausa and Yoruba cut across ethnic boundaries, thereby assuming the status of *lingua franca*; they became "international" languages of trade, commerce, and politics in many West African communities before the establishment of organized 'formal' education.

As long as no more was expected of the mother tongue than that it should develop the personality and character of each individual and weave him harmoniously into the social pattern, it mattered little how numerically small or linguistically isolated the group happened to be. In other words, in the indigenous system of mother tongue education, there was no problem of matter and method. The mother tongues were largely manifestations of traditional West African culture.

But occasional wider contacts, not only inter-ethnically among West African communities, but also internationally (especially with the Europeans, and the European customs, habits and school system), led to the problem of mother tongue education in the somewhat artificial countries of West Africa following the 'partition' of Africa. Since this

<sup>4</sup>For one of the detailed works on indigenous education in the context of West Africa, see: James A Majasan, *Yoruba Education: its Principles, Practice, and Relevance to current Educational Development*, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1967. (Unpublished Thesis).

<sup>5</sup>For instance, see:

(a) E.W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, London, OUP, 1958;

(b) F.D. Fage, *An Introduction to the History of West Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1955.

partition did not follow the traditional linguistic pattern, problems arose with regard to language policy and practice in the formal school system of these countries. It is useful to examine there wider contacts of the West Africans and the implications they had for mother tongue education previously.

The partition of Africa among the rival colonial governments on the whole took place in 1884. However, non-Africans already had contacts with the West Africa communities. As early as 1365, navigators from Dieppe landed in the Ivory Coast. Soon afterwards, the Portuguese, following the Papal blessing, visited the littoral of many West African countries and, in the 15th century, they established some influence in what has become Senegal, Togo and southern Nigeria. However, their influence faded with the collapse of their efforts and they made no significant linguistic impact on the languages in the area, apart from some Portuguese loan-words which infiltrated into certain mother tongues of the area.

Contacts with North Africa considerably predated those with Europe. Certain countries, such as Mauritania and the Niger, were much influenced by the Berbers and the Islamic empires, and hence by the Arabic language, from 800 A.D. onwards. Koranic schools (lower primary level), the *Ilm* school (upper primary and secondary level) and the higher type of Muslim institutions (which award the *Alimiyyah* to graduates) sprang up in many cities of West Africa, all with Arabic as the language of instruction. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Kano and Katsina were famous centres of learning.<sup>6</sup> The Muslims of West Africa regarded the Arabic language as the language of the Islamic religion, therefore sacred, and until very recently, the Koran was not translated into many West African languages. Today in Mauritania, Arabic and French are both declared national languages.<sup>7</sup>

Between the 15th and the 18th centuries, different European countries (i.e. France, the Netherlands, England) motivated by different aspirations—predominantly trade, earlier in slaves, but later in raw materials—spread their socio-political influence to the West African countries.

The collapse of the slave trade and the so-called humanitarian spirit which followed its attempted suppression led to the founding of many

<sup>6</sup>See: (a) J.O. Hunwick, "Report on a Seminar on the Teaching of Arabic in Nigeria held at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (11-15 July 1965)".

(b) Selim Hakim: "Report of the Teaching of Arabic in Schools and Colleges in Nigeria", Ibadan, University College, Institute of Education, 1961.

(c) J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in West Africa*, Oxford, 1959.

<sup>7</sup>N. Sasnett and I. Sepmeyer, *Educational Systems of Africa*, p. 692, University of California, 1966.

religious organizations in Europe and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> It was obvious that Africa, particularly West Africa, provided the necessary 'soil' for Christian endeavours. The Christian missionaries as has already been pointed out were particularly active in Anglophone West Africa.

Meanwhile, the nineteenth century saw bitter rivalry between certain European powers over the possession of parts of West Africa. This reached a climax at the Berlin Conference in 1884 when Africa (excluding Liberia) was partitioned among the European countries—most of the West African countries were allocated to France and Britain while Togo and Cameroon were placed under German control (1884–1914). Consequently, the types of formal educational systems that evolved reflected the educational policies of the relevant European countries.

### FRENCH-SPEAKING WEST AFRICA

Mother tongue education has little significance in the French-speaking countries of West Africa, although the situation is changing. Emphasis has generally been on the teaching and use of French. Recently English, thanks to Pan-Africanism, began assuming greater importance. Except in Mauritania, French is the only official language of instruction in the schools.<sup>9</sup>

France has always been the ultimate model and the centre of inspiration for all her colonies. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the bases of French policy in West Africa were the liberal ideas of the French Revolution and the concept of one universal civilization towards which the world was moving and of which Europe was the leader. Therefore, the formal educational system which France introduced was modelled upon French ways of thought and French civilization, with the French language its undisputed vehicle of thought<sup>10</sup> and medium of communication. In all the French colonies, learning French was considered as an essential preliminary to all intellectual activity and the French or French-trained teachers were convinced that, by teaching the French language and culture to the Africans, they were bestowing an invaluable gift, a gift which would form the key to unlock all the doors of French culture and wider civilization.

France built her first schools at St. Louis, Senegal, in about 1856, al-

<sup>8</sup>J.F.A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria: 1841-1891*, p. 1, London, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1965.

<sup>9</sup>N. Sasnett and I. Sepmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 692.

<sup>10</sup>For one of the best reviews of French educational policy before 1935, see W. Bryant Mumford, *Africans Learn to be French*, New York, Negro Universities Press, 1970. (Reprint)



though mission schools had been established by Christian missionaries in Cameroon as early as 1843. During the nineteenth century, pioneering work was done by various religious orders in most French West African countries. An unsuccessful attempt made in the early years to use Wolof as the medium of instruction was abandoned and thereafter French became the sole linguistic vehicle for instruction at all levels.<sup>11</sup> The schools were modelled on the system in France and this system was common to all the French Colonies. For instance, the elementary schools usually had the following stages:

- (1) Cours préparatoire
- (2) Cours élémentaire
- (3) Cours Moyen

At the completion of the elementary school, the *Certificat d'études primaires élémentaires* (First School Leaving Certificate) was awarded. Since French was the official language of instruction at all grades, the *section d'initiation* was designed to teach the kindergarten-aged children oral French which would help them in the teaching-learning process, especially at the *cours élémentaire* grade.

The French educational system, unlike the British, was highly centralized. Again, unlike the situation in the Anglophone colonies, the Christian missions played little or no role in the development of mother tongue education. Their role in general was much more limited, due to the fact that in the early French Republican days, the church was regarded as the enemy of reason, the stronghold of conservatism and an obstacle to development and progress.<sup>12</sup> Humanitarian principles, based on the philosophy of the brotherhood of man irrespective of race and creed, were championed by the French State. Adequate education for all citizens, black and white, came to be regarded as a moral responsibility of the government which could not be delegated to private organizations such as the Christian missions. Hence until recently, mission schools were not subsidised and there was some suspicion between the State and the Church in these countries.

Yet in French West Africa the Christian missions were a necessary evil and their influence varied from country to country. For instance, there were no mission schools in Mauritania, very few in the Niger, and those in Senegal and Mali were weak. On the other hand, they were comparatively strong in the Ivory Coast while in Dahomey they instructed more primary school pupils than did the state schools.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>V. Thompson and R. Adloff., *French West Africa*, p. 516, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1958.

<sup>12</sup>W.B. Mumford, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup>V. Thompson and R. Adloff, *op. cit.*, p. 537.



In 1948–49, nearly 33,000 children were being taught in the mission schools of French West Africa, compared with some 98,000 in the government schools.<sup>14</sup> French was the medium of instruction in both systems.

Many educated West Africans also favoured the exclusive use of French. For instance, at the Brazzaville conference of 1944, most of the participants agreed on the need for a rapid increase in primary education facilities and for the continued use of French “in preference to native dialects as the medium of instruction”.<sup>15</sup> A small scale experiment in adult education started at Labe, Guinea, in 1949, failed, largely because the people rejected instruction in the vernacular—they wanted the working knowledge of French that would make them independent of interpreters in their dealings with the administration.<sup>16</sup>

It appears that, prior to independence, most educated Africans in this area frowned on and opposed teaching in the mother tongue primarily because they felt it would lead to a low status for African scholars vis-à-vis French scholars. For example, a Guinean representative told the French Union Assembly on 4 July 1950, “We want a Metropolitan Curriculum.... and the same diplomas as in France, for we are as French as are the French of the Metropole”.<sup>17</sup> Consequently the mother tongues were not developed and few of them had any adequate written literature.

However, exclusive use of French had certain inevitable consequences. First it disguised for some time the fact that Africans, as a whole, lived in and experienced a socio-economic and political structure different from that of the French. A few years of formal schooling, however French-oriented in medium and content it was, could hardly break down inherited socio-cultural patterns and thereby transform Africans into Europeans. At best, it sometimes created a cultural conflict whereby Africans would find themselves living in two different worlds but citizens of neither—with the inevitable consequences. In addition, the requirement to learn French as the language of instruction usually retarded scholastic progress.<sup>18</sup> Children were frequently forced to drop out of school because their repeated failures—largely resulting from the use of a foreign language as the medium of instruction—carried them beyond the age limits set in France for promotion to the next grade.

However, before independence (which occurred in 1960 for all the

<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*, p. 534.

<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*, p. 520–21

<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, p. 546.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*, p. 540 (footnote).

<sup>18</sup>For instance, see Ronald Verbeke, “Langues véhiculaires de l’enseignement en Afrique noire”, *International Review of Education*, Hamburg, Unesco Institute for Education, vol. 12, no. 4, 1966, p. 450–466.

countries concerned except Guinea which gained her independence in 1958), it was generally realized, even by the French authorities, that there were certain subjects which could not be delayed until the French language was understood. Furthermore, with the attainment of independence, other factors made modification of the language policy almost inevitable. For instance, the Pan-African movement underlined the importance of teaching English in French-speaking countries as an aid to international communication within Africa. Besides, the revival of African arts and culture, notably embodied in the philosophy of negritude, assigned a new role to mother tongues. In addition, it was realised that a child's mother tongue is not a garment he can cast aside when he dons his school uniform: it is part of the stuff of which his mind is built; it embodies the ideas and attitudes he has gained from his environment; it is the language through which he has acquired the earliest experiences of life; and it is the language by which he dreams, thinks, cherishes, loves, scolds, and learns.<sup>19</sup>

One example of the gradual transformation of policy is the use of local mother tongues in some cases in the early classes (*section d'initiation*) to introduce the young learners into the formal school system.

Adult literacy programmes provide a startling contrast to the above in that mother tongues have been widely utilized. From 1918 to 1944, classes for adults were organized in towns and a few up-country areas. In 1935, about 200 courses were being attended by some 8400 Africans.<sup>20</sup> Most of the courses, taught in mother tongues, offered practical instruction in hygiene and agriculture or various crafts.

In 1948, the French National Commission for Unesco set up a committee to prepare French fundamental education campaigns which involved the use of the mother tongues of French West Africa.<sup>21</sup> In Guinea, adult literacy can be acquired in all six main mother tongues of the country i.e. Pular, Guerze, Toman, Kisi, Susu, and Malinke.<sup>22</sup> In Togo, adult

<sup>19</sup>G.R. Sharma, "The Teacher of Hindi", *Shiksha*, April, 1957, p. 48.

<sup>20</sup>Though there is yet to be a definite language policy in regard to mother tongue education in the formal primary school system which still makes use of a great number of French teachers, discussions appear to be going on concerning means of adapting the inherited educational system to the aspiration of the African peoples. For instance, see:

(a) "Création d'un Conseil Supérieur de L'Education au Sénégal" *Afrique Nouvelle*, no. 1163, 1969, p. 4.

(b) A.M. Ayiri, "Colloque Sur la réforme de l'Enseignement au Togo, *Nouvelle*, 4 - 10 December 1969, no. 1165.

<sup>21</sup>Sam F. Cheavens, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

<sup>22</sup>(a) Philip J. Foster, "Problems of Literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa", *op. cit.*, p. 604.

(b) International Bureau of Education, *Literacy and Education for Adults*, Paris, Unesco, 1964.

classes were first taught in the mother tongue, i.e. Ewe, and then in the French language. In Cameroon, Unesco has set up a centre at Yaoundé to encourage the production of reading materials.<sup>23</sup> It distributes mother tongue literature, leaflets and coloured pamphlets which are described as "easy to read, entertaining....translated as simply as possible into the spoken dialect".<sup>25</sup> Similar adult literacy programmes in the mother tongues of West Africa go on in Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.

The stimulus for adult literacy education in French West Africa was provided in 1951 when the French Commission for Fundamental Education in West Africa began planning an adult education experiment in M'Boumba.<sup>24</sup> The French Fundamental Education Office has also set up a complete audio-visual workshop.

### ENGLISH-SPEAKING WEST AFRICA

While the French colonial policy emphasized the assimilation of Africans into what was regarded as the French 'universal culture', the British colonial policy was largely *laissez-faire*. Except as 'protectors' of the indigenous peoples, there was, on the part of the British government and the governments of the colonial territories, an attitude of "minding one's business". Matters such as religion and education were regarded as the affair of the peoples themselves. Consequently, education was left largely in the hands of mission organizations and was generally regarded as a 'frill' rather than an essential duty of the government. This policy gave some flexibility to the theory and practice of education.

Since the colonies were meant to pay for their existence and development, it was economical for the British colonial government to regard the Christian missionaries with benevolent tolerance in their colonies and to assist them, in some cases, with grants-in-aid in their educational programme.

The origins of Christian missionary endeavour in English-speaking West Africa can be traced to Freetown, founded in 1787 in Sierra Leone by the British government as a home for liberated Africans during the heat of the campaign to suppress the slave trade. Soon, many Africans of diverse linguistic backgrounds settled there.

Fourah Bay College, founded some years later at Freetown, contributed considerably to the development of West African languages. The early production of school primers and the production of mother tongue

<sup>23</sup>Mary Burnet, *ABC of Literacy*, p. 25, Unesco, 1965.

<sup>24</sup>Sam F. Cheavens, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.*

literature through translations can be attributed to persons connected with Freetown and with the college.<sup>26</sup>

It must be realized, however, that the interest of the Christian missionaries in West African languages was dictated mainly by religious motives. The pedagogical implications of their linguistic efforts were a by-product. The early missionaries realised that to understand the mind of the so-called 'primitive' African and teach him the way of salvation and faith, they must have an intimate knowledge of the indigenous languages. In other words, the 'formal' school was regarded as the institutional agent of the spiritual church, with the mother tongues as the media.

But the task of reducing the mother tongues to writing was beset with difficulties from the outset. Anthropology and linguistics were in their infancy and the pioneer missionaries, who were usually practical men of decided initiative, did not allow the subtleties of philological exactitude or the lack of phonetic symbols for the languages or dialects in question to impede the production of vernacular written literature—and their Bible translations.<sup>28</sup>

However, it soon became obvious to the colonial governments that intervention in the missions' educational programmes was inevitable. This intervention took two forms: the provision of grants-in-aid to subsidise the Voluntary Agency schools and the promulgation of education codes to regulate the educational system. Both had major consequences for mother tongue education.

The first colonial Education Ordinance for West Africa, 6 May 1882, regulated the educational practices of Lagos and the Gold Coast. The section which led to a stormy conflict in regard to mother tongue education was the provision that "the subjects of teaching shall be the reading and writing of the English language".<sup>29</sup> The ordinance also led to a system of grants-in-aid to schools, based partly on enrolment and partly on results produced in English. By implication, the teaching of the mother tongues would not qualify any Voluntary Agency schools for the grants-

<sup>26</sup>For details on early studies of West African Languages in Sierra Leone, see:

(a) P.E.H. Hair, "The Contribution of Freetown and Sierra Leone to the study of West African Languages", *Sierra Leone Language Review*, no. 1, 1962, p. 7-18.

(b) P.E.H. Hair, *The Early Study* ....*op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup>This has created orthographic problems for some West African languages in regard to mother tongue education. For instance, in regard to Yoruba orthography in Nigeria see:

A. Bamgboṣe, *Yoruba Orthography*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1965.

<sup>29</sup>For the reproduction of the 1882 Education Ordinance, see: National Archives, Ibadan. Nigeria CSO/26: A Special List of Records on the subject of Education. By Gwam. Appendix 46-47. See also C.O. Takwi "The mother tongue as a means of promoting equal access to education in Nigeria", p. 3-6, Unesco Documents ED/WS/307 Paris, 8 June 1972.

in-aid which were crucial at a time when the financial position of the Christian missions was precarious. The alternatives were to teach English and qualify for grants, or teach the mother tongue and take the consequences.

With Nigeria as their operational base, the Christian missionaries decided to fight. Petitions were drafted and demonstrations in support of mother tongue education were held. The Colonial Office replied that it considered the protest to be 'misplaced patriotism' because they felt that the "Memorialists", as the Lagos petitioners were called, wanted easy grants by giving instruction in the mother tongue. Furthermore, it was alleged that the petition might be a ruse for the introduction of religious instruction, since most of the literature in the mother tongues was religious in content.<sup>30</sup> The backbone of the petition was broken when it was emphasized that the Ordinance did not forbid the teaching of the mother tongue, but rather that such teaching was expected to pay for itself.

This attitude of "benevolent tolerance", without any systematic planning, dominated mother tongue education in all the British colonies. However, it was not long before the impact of external and internal factors—dealt with below—exposed the inherent weakness of this policy.

The problem of the medium of communication between the colonial officials and the Africans, largely unacquainted with English, was acute and had political implications. The Christian missionaries faced the same situation. As a result, a European Language Examination scheme was initiated in 1895, requiring all Europeans to be conversant with one or more local mother tongues.<sup>31</sup>

The Phelps-Stokes Fund financed two commissions to assess the quantity and quality of education given to the Africans. The published reports criticized the neglect of the mother tongue, pointing out that mother tongue education for Africans "is the means of giving expression to their own personality, however primitive they may be".<sup>32</sup> The British

<sup>30</sup>For a detailed discussion of the 'vernacular' controversy, see:

(a) M.J. Walsh, *Catholic Contribution to Education in Western Nigeria; 1861-1926*, London, 1951. (M.A. Thesis.)

(b) Timothy A. Awoniyi, *The Role and Status of the Yoruba Language in the Formal School System of Western Nigeria: 1846-1971*, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1973. (Ph.D. Thesis.)

(c) Rev. M. Sunter, *Report on the Schools in the Colony of Lagos*, 1884. The early European Colonial Inspectors of Schools appeared to have a negative reaction to mother tongue education. For instance, see: National Archives, *Annual Report on the Education Department Southern Provinces*, p. 7, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1926.

<sup>31</sup>For details, see: Timothy A. Awoniyi, *op. cit.*, chapter v.

<sup>32</sup>L.J. Lewis (ed), *Phelps-Stokes Reports on Education in Africa*, Abridged with an introduction by L.J. Lewis, p. 63, London, OUP, 1962.



government followed with interest the activities of the Phelps-Stokes commissions and considered their subsequent reports as an appraisal of the educational policy of the Colonial government. As such, they exercised an influence on mother tongue education in the colonies.

Furthermore, there were periodic meetings of colonial officers who were connected with education in the colonies to review the educational problems in their respective territories. The 1923 Imperial Conference, and even more so the 1927 Conference, considered quite specifically the problems involved in mother tongue education in Africa.<sup>33</sup> Resolutions adopted at the meetings became the guidelines of policy in regard to this subject.

Then, on 29 June 1926, the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures was formally inaugurated.<sup>34</sup> Two of its objectives were to study the languages and cultures of the natives of Africa and "to assist in the production of an educational literature in the mother tongue". It soon produced a memorandum on textbooks in the mother tongues for African schools; it established its own journal in 1928 and later in 1930 produced a pamphlet on practical orthography for African languages.

The School of Oriental (and later African) Studies was formally opened on 23rd February 1917. Since that date, it has been associated with the training of West Africans in the analysis of their mother tongues in addition to its own studies of African languages.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, local enthusiasm for mother tongue education grew as many local authors started to produce textbooks in the vernaculars. Monolingual and bilingual newspapers emerged which attempted to satisfy the peoples' desires to read in their own tongues. In Nigeria there were seven or so newspapers in Yoruba between 1900 and 1940.<sup>36</sup> The Church Missionary Society and the Sudan Interior Mission also had publishing houses which produced works written in the local languages.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, a committee was appointed in 1923 to provide continual advice to the British Government on problems related to African education. In 1927, this advisory committee issued a memorandum on the place of the vernacular in native education. This was the first significant step taken by the Colonial Office in regard to mother tongue education.

<sup>33</sup>Great Britain, *Report of Imperial Education Conference*, H.M.S.O., 1927.

<sup>34</sup>Sir F.D. Lugard, "The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures", *Africa: Journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1-12, 1928.

<sup>35</sup>P.U. Hartog, "The Origins of the School: 1917-1920", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* no. 1: p. 5-22, (Reprinted by Krans Reprint Ltd., Vaduz, 1964).

<sup>36</sup>See: Timothy A. Awoniyi, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>37</sup>For the history of early printing in Africa, see: P.E.H., Hair, "Early Vernacular Printing in Africa", *Sierra Leone Language Review*, no. 3, p. 47-52, 1964.

The memorandum declared that, as far as possible, the vernacular should be the basis of instruction, at least in the primary classes. Here the advisory nature of this memorandum should be emphasised, for local situations often determined policy. In many English-speaking West African countries, the mother tongue was the medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school, with English introduced gradually. Recognition of some vernaculars in public examinations possibly gave greater impetus to mother tongue education than did colonial policy. For instance, from 1931 to 1951, through the provision made by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate, it was possible to offer papers in Yoruba, Gã, Fante, and Twi at the London Matriculation Examinations.<sup>38</sup> Even though the value of an examination, externally set and marked, should not be exaggerated, there is no doubt that this move encouraged mother tongue education.

With the introduction of the London General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) examinations, private candidates could present themselves for certain subjects including such West African languages as Yoruba, Hausa, Twi, Efik, Igbo, etc at the Ordinary Level. +

As the London G.C.E. examinations in West African languages maintained the interest of private candidates, the West African School Certificate (WASC) Examinations, which also included West African languages, stimulated the interest of pupils at the secondary school level.

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC), established in 1951, is responsible for moderating WASC examinations in anglophone West Africa. In addition, the WAEC also supervises the London G.C.E. examinations in this area. Recently, the WAEC has taken over the examinations in this area. Recently, the WAEC has taken over the examinations in the West African languages at both the WASC and G.C.E. levels; and subsequently has revised the syllabuses in these local languages. However, examinations alone do not improve the theory and practice of mother tongue education; institutions of higher learning should show interest in the study of the West African Languages.

Even though Fourah Bay College, as mentioned earlier, had been a great pioneer institution in the study of African languages between 1800 and 1880, its interest later dwindled and, in the first half of the twentieth century, it almost ceased to take interest in African languages. Other universities which were later established in West Africa, notably University College of Ibadan (1948) and University College of the Gold Coast,

<sup>38</sup>See L.J. Lewis, "The Place of African Languages in the Secondary School Curriculum", *West African Journal of Education*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1957 p. 20-22.

+ In January 1967, 5,041 candidates offered Yoruba and 100 candidates Hausa.

had no record of extensive study of West African languages before they became autonomous institutions.

Today, these two universities, and others more recently established, have taken interest in the study and teaching of African languages. The activities of the universities have varied from one institution to the other, but a common feature in most is the establishment of a department of linguistics and local languages or the founding of an institute of African studies which carries out research into the mother tongues. Then too the rapidly-expanding departments and institutes of education are, through their mother tongue methodology courses, producing future classroom teachers for mother tongue education.

The employment of the mother tongues in adult literacy programmes must be noted. In 1953, Dr Wolff was appointed, under the auspices of Unesco, to make a survey of the orthographies of some Nigerian languages. He arrived in Nigeria and made recommendations on the orthography of Idoma, Nupe, Kanuri, Fulani, etc.<sup>39</sup> Subsequent Unesco activities in the development of West African mother tongues for literacy programmes included the meetings of experts on African languages held at Ibadan (1964), Accra (1965), Bamako (1966), Niamey (1966) and Yaoundé (1967).<sup>40</sup>

The developments outlined above relate to the former British colonies. Liberia, the oldest independent state in West Africa, has always had English as its official language. The public school system functions uniquely in this language and mother tongue education is negligible.<sup>42</sup> Through missionary activity, however, many of the people have learnt to read their own language. The mother tongues are also used in literacy campaigns as bridges to English. In 1951, 13 languages were in use, each having its own primer.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, the Liberian government, working with experts from Unesco, has set up 16 fundamental education schools in the Klay region. There, teaching begins in Gola, the most widely used mother tongue of the district, but in the second year the medium is changed to English.<sup>44</sup>

## PORTUGUESE—AND SPANISH-SPEAKING WEST AFRICA

There is little information on the position of mother tongue education in Guinea-Bissau or in Fernando Po. It seems that the general policy in

<sup>39</sup>Hans Wolff, *Nigerian Orthography*, Zaria, Gaskya Corporation, 1954.

<sup>40</sup>C.O. Taiwo, "The Mother Tongue as a means..." *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup>Sam F. Cheavens, *op. cit.*, p. 420-421.

<sup>43</sup>Unesco, *The Use of Vernacular*.....*op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup>Unesco, *Liberian Fundamental Education Project* (Fundamental and Adult Education), vol. vi, no. 4, October 1954, p. 191.

the Portuguese territories called for the official use of Portuguese as the language of instruction.<sup>45</sup> This is an aspect of the Portuguese assimilation policy, for to become assimilated, a colonial subject had to be able to write and speak Portuguese very well. Following this policy, the Portuguese authorities discouraged mother tongues "to the extent of a legal requirement that nothing may appear in an African language without a concurrent translation in Portuguese".<sup>46</sup> The language situation in the Spanish Colony of Fernando Po seems fairly similar to that in the Portuguese colonies. Spanish is the official language of instruction in schools with the result that there has been little development of the mother tongues.

### OUTSIDE INTEREST

The West African Languages Survey (WALS), established in 1960 with funds from the Ford Foundation has, with its successor, the West African Linguistic Society (founded in 1965), encouraged scholars to carry out specific research into several West African languages. Under its auspices, the *West African Language Monographs Series* were published. WALS also sponsored both the publication of the *Journal of West African Languages* and also the West African Languages Congresses (the tenth Congress was held at the University of Ghana, Legon, in March 1972). Such congresses have provided a forum where linguists interested in West African languages can exchange ideas on the latest developments and studies in the field.

### CONCLUSION

In spite of the wave of enthusiasm now being shown, locally and internationally, for mother tongue education and in spite of achievements, in particular in anglophone West Africa, certain problems should be noted: historical and descriptive data are needed on many more languages of West Africa; language coordinating centres are urgently required, thereby demanding increased cooperation among the many countries involved, regardless of their previous colonial experience; although the build up of theory concerning languages is advancing well, adequate mother tongue education must be developed to utilize meaningfully this theory; and teacher training in mother tongue education needs to be improved with emphasis placed not only on pedagogy but also on the wider implications of the role of the mother tongue in the education of the African child.

<sup>45</sup>(a) Sam F. Cheavens, *op. cit.*, p. 422.

(b) Unesco, *The Use of Vernacular.....op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup>John Spencer, "Colonial Language Policies and their Legacies *op. cit.*, p. 542-543.

The solution to each of the above problems will demand more funds, adequate planning and a change of attitude, for many West Africans still consider their mother tongues as inferior local languages relative to the prevalent European language. Many Africans do not realize that the early language of the child furnishes the conceptual substance from which he builds *new creations of thought*, and the *signal* with which he can direct himself. Also since man is himself the cause, transmitter and recipient of culture, language reflects the culture and personality of the individual as well as of the group to which he belongs. To be meaningful, education in the African context has to be based on the cultural milieu of the Africans.



# 3 The Use of the Mother Tongue in Education in Sierra Leone

Clifford Fyle

## THE LANGUAGE SITUATION

The 1963 census report of the Sierra Leone government gives the population of the 27,000 square mile area of the country as two and a quarter million. Many educated Sierra Leoneans have doubted this figure and have estimated a population of about four million. They give as their reasons the incomplete registration of births and deaths, the difficulty of getting at a large percentage of the shifting population and the fear of many, in spite of propaganda to the contrary, that any head count is purely for purposes of tax collection. A presidential broadcast in May 1973 indicated that a new census will take place soon. Whatever the case, the figure of two and a quarter million with its various breakdowns as given in the 1963 Report remains officially valid for Sierra Leone.

The report lists some 18 languages spoken by Sierra Leoneans. To these 18, we must add two more languages, English, the country's only official language and Arabic. English is the language of external communication, of school and university education, of the higher reaches of officialdom and of business and industry and by and large of the Christian religion. Arabic is the language of Islam; Islam and Christianity together account for up to 90 per cent of the overt religious life of the country. Through Islam, Arabic has also become a language of literacy. Muslim children, even those who do not attend regular schools, are often taught to read and write in Arabic so that they better understand their religion. As a result, large numbers of Sierra Leoneans usually considered illiterate can in fact read and write Arabic. This applies particularly outside Freetown and its environs. In addition, they can and often do read and write their own native languages using the Arab script. While statistics are not available, many individual cases of apparently illiterate people who communicate with each other and keep business records in this way have been attested to. In fact, it has been suggested by some Sierra Leone

scholars<sup>1</sup> that if the Arabic script were to be adopted for writing the Krio language, the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone, the current figures for literacy in the country would immediately be more than doubled.

English and Arabic, however, are not mother tongues in Sierra Leone. For purposes of mass communication, the most important of the mother tongues is Krio, a creole language oriented towards English. Krio is the mother tongue of only about 1.9 per cent of the population, but it serves the purposes of the middle and the lower reaches of officialdom, of business and industry and of some out-of-school education. It is the most important language of politics as well as the language invariably used when Sierra Leoneans of different language backgrounds meet informally, at whatever level and for whatever purpose.

The two languages which are the mother tongues of well over half of the population are Mende and Temne. In comparison, the other language groups are quite small. The total language distribution is as follows:

|          | <i>No. of<br/>Speakers</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|----------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Mende    | 673,000                    | 29.9              |
| Temne    | 649,000                    | 24.4              |
| Limba    | 183,500                    | 8.1               |
| Kono     | 104,600                    | 4.6               |
| Kuranko  | 80,700                     | 3.6               |
| Sherbro  | 74,700                     | 3.3               |
| Susu     | 67,300                     | 3.0               |
| Fula     | 66,800                     | 3.0               |
| Loko     | 64,500                     | 2.9               |
| Mandingo | 51,000                     | 2.3               |
| Kisi     | 49,000                     | 2.2               |
| Krio     | 41,800                     | 1.9               |
| Yalunka  | 15,000                     | .7                |
| Krim     | 8,700                      | .4                |
| Vai      | 5,800                      | .2                |
| Gola     | 4,900                      | .2                |
| Kru      | 4,800                      | .2                |
| Galinas  | 2,200                      | .1                |

As can be seen, the language situation in Sierra Leone is complex. Four factors may be noted in connection with this complexity:

(1) The factor of dialects. Mende, for example, has at least six known dialects (Kɔ Mende, Sewama Mende, Komboya Mende, Kpa Mende,

<sup>1</sup>For example, by the linguist Dr. A.K. Turay of Njala University College, and Mr. S.K. Dabo, Languages, Fourah Bay College, whose permission I have to quote them here.

Sherbro Mende and Wanjuma Mende). Temne has at least three (Konkay Temne, Yoni Temne and Gbembeli Temne). Limba has at least four (Safroko Limba, Wara-Wara Limba, Tonko Limba and Biriwa Limba). As a *lingua franca*, Krio also exhibits dialectal differences from area to area within the country, differences which, understandably, can be traced to the influence of the predominant local language within each area.

(2) Although orthographies have been devised for many of the languages, written literature available in them is quite scanty. The Provincial Literature Bureau, which at present is the sole publisher for books in the local languages, lists 64 titles for Mende, 42 for Temne, five each for Limba, Kono and Kuranko, two for Loko, one for Yalunka, and none for the other eleven mother tongues. Even so, the great majority of these publications are not really books—rather, they are small teaching primers and follow-up readers, under 50 pages in length, aimed purely at teaching adults to read in their own languages and, as far as possible, at keeping them literate. Standard grammars and dictionaries are available only for Mende, Temne and Krio.

Krio is more fortunate than many of the other indigenous languages in that, in addition to its grammar and dictionaries (though these are not generally available except to interested scholars), a substantial body of writing—poems, short stories, plays, and even novels—exists. However, there is as yet no standard orthography for Krio and the problem of the economics of publishing Krio material for a comparatively small general readership has not yet been solved; therefore, hardly any of this writing is available in print.

For the reasons given above, coupled with the fact that Sierra Leone, the oldest British ex-colony in West Africa, has perhaps been more oriented towards Britain than have Nigeria, Ghana and the Gambia, the local languages have not been used enough for the purposes of teaching in schools.

One result of the above is the prevention of the widespread recognition of any one form of any of the languages as standard and thus the preservation of dialectal variations. Even the 64 'books' available for Mende and the 42 available for Temne do not make much difference in this regard. For example, the total sales in 1970/71 of the Provincial Literature Bureau's publications in Mende and Temne (including newspapers and magazines as well as books amounted to less than 25,000 for Mende and only a little over 3,000 for Temne. In both cases, the newspapers and magazines accounted for well over 25 per cent.

(3) The third factor is that of group consciousness. This factor works not so much in the direction of preserving dialectal differences as of

preserving *language* differences as such. Of course, group consciousness always exists at every level, continent, nation, tribe, home, etc. Significantly in Sierra Leone, however, group consciousness has operated at the level of the ethnic group. While leaders and other influential Sierra Leoneans may do their best to work towards a single, unified country, each ethnic group, particularly the larger ones, tends to assert itself at the expense of other groups.

Tribal consciousness always means language consciousness. Therefore in Sierra Leone, the Mende man, the Temne man and the Limba man all tend to be quite emotional about their languages.

Thus, dialectal differences continue to be preserved, and the country's languages are regarded as separate languages, each in its own right, each as the most distinguishing feature and the symbol of a group which wants to continue to be regarded as such, even within the context of one country.

(4) Finally, we come to the mobility factor, which, unlike the previous three, works towards unity. Above bush village level, the population of Sierra Leone is becoming increasingly mobile. There are now schools even in remote areas and often the teachers are not native to the local community. Then too, people travel constantly for reasons of business, trade, etc. Indeed the moment one begins to live above the level of subsistence farming, the necessity for travel arises, and the higher one climbs in society, the greater becomes this need. This coupled with the fact that Sierra Leone is a small country, somewhat circular in shape, means that the city and the big towns on the one hand, and the most remote villages areas on the other, tend to be in touch constantly. Added to this, more people are leaving their homes to work in the big towns and villages—a pattern of population drift that commonly occurs in other parts of the world.

For these reasons, the average Sierra Leonean, literate or illiterate, tends to be multilingual. The languages that figure most prominently in this multilingual situation are understandably Krio, the *lingua franca*, Mende, Temne and the official language, English. It is not uncommon to come across an illiterate man who speaks three or even all four of these, plus one or more dialect(s) in his mother tongue if it happens to be another of Sierra Leone's 18 languages.

This means that language contact is quite frequent and all the languages borrow constantly from each other and from English. In view of the pull of these various factors in different directions and of the continuing dominance of English as the language of education and of the educated, it is not clear what language situation will ultimately emerge in Sierra Leone. At present, socially speaking, there is a hierarchy of languages

in the country, with English the most prestigious, Krio following as a close second, Mende and Temne, third, and all others—headed by Limba—in fourth place. This hierarchy of prestige is also, of course, a hierarchy in terms of need, and need is always a very powerful factor. But the needs might change—certainly the need for grass roots development and thus for a common means of communication is now so great Krio is becoming (or perhaps has already become) a much more important language, generally speaking, than English. Social and political needs may also change; these are much less predictable than developmental and economic needs, but in their own way, they are just as important in determining which languages become more influential in the country, which languages disappear and which simply survive.

### THE MOTHER TONGUE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

In Sierra Leone, English is used as the language of instruction for all primary education. In this respect, the position is different from that of a country such as Nigeria where the language of instruction for the first two or three years of school is a local vernacular. This pattern was established when the first primary schools were founded by European Christian missionaries in Freetown, now the capital, around the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it has been followed ever since.

However, although English alone is officially recognized as a language for use in primary school, inevitably local languages play a role. The local language used in a particular school is normally the predominant language in the area of the country in which the school is situated, thus the mother tongue of the majority of the children and a second language of the remaining minority. This language plays its role as follows:

(1) In beginning classes particularly, the teacher and children may use the local language whenever they are unable to communicate in English.

This usually happens during the first few months when five-to six-year-old children enter school for the first time. These young children are taught English almost from the first day, in a number of ways. First, there is direct teaching in language lessons: the teacher introduces simple English words and sentence patterns, and, by the use of voice, gestures, pictures and other devices, teaches the children to understand and use them. Next, the teacher uses English as much as he can, all the time if possible, in his teaching of other subjects, such as counting and writing, and in his general relationship with his pupils. Finally, the children learn nursery and other rhymes and songs (and in Christian schools, hymns and prayers) in English. In this third respect, it is doubtful how much children actually learn, because often they have little or no under-



standing of what they are taught to say. However, the fact remains that by these means the young beginner is bombarded with English in the school environment right from the first day, so that given a school of average competence, within three months or so, the child acquires enough English to understand his teachers and be understood by them in simple classroom situations, although he can speak far less than he can understand.

During these first months, however, the teacher frequently must express express himself in the mother tongue or the dominant local language. Children also need to use this local language, and quite often do use it in order to convey to the teacher what they cannot yet express in English—their complaints and grievances, their personal experiences or news that they want to share, and so on. With increasing control of English, this use of the local language steadily diminishes during primary schooling; it reflects badly on a teacher's skill and on a child if recourse to the vernacular is still necessary or if the pupil's English is studded with native words in classes for nine-to eleven-year olds. However, throughout primary school, and even secondary school, the local language is present for use as a last resort in the classroom.

(2) The teacher may make deliberate use of the local language in the primary school to develop self-expression and creativity.

One of the language teacher's duties is to develop communication skills—speaking, reading and writing, observing, listening and understanding. He also seeks to develop creativity and self-expression in his pupils. Any language can be used as the medium, but in a situation such as that in Sierra Leone, where English is the language to be taught and taught in, this development is expected to take place through the medium of English.

In particular circumstances, however, use has to be made of the mother tongue or the dominant local language. This sometimes happens during listening activities, particularly when, for educational purposes, the teacher requires children to listen outside the classroom (for example, to conversations in a market, to what is said at a village celebration, and so on). More often, it happens when the teacher tries to help young children to express themselves, their thoughts, ideas and emotions with fluency, so that they develop confidence in speaking to individuals, to friends or before an audience. When such speaking has to be original (i.e. when it is not the recitation of a given poem or prose passage or of a part in a play), the language teacher (and here this means the English teacher) has no option but to allow children who do not yet have enough mastery of English to express themselves fluently in this foreign medium to use their mother tongue or the dominant local language.

There is no specific legislation for or against such use in the primary school. No teacher is ever questioned as to whether or not he uses the local language in this way. If anything, however, tacit, though not overt, approval is given to the practice. On school speech days and at prize-giving ceremonies, teachers often have children perform plays in the local language. Such plays are sometimes written, sometimes improvised, but they never fail to win the loud approval of audiences of the general public and of education officials.

The point here is that the development of self-expression and creativity is a different kind of exercise from the learning of English as a language, and therefore even though the same teacher may be involved, this need not be tied to English teaching and learning. In fact, this development through the medium of the local language may be considered as an important element in the development of the use of English, because once the child is able to express himself confidently and creatively in one language medium, it is less difficult for him to express himself in the same way through the medium of another language.

(3) In the teaching of English, particularly in the upper primary classes, the teacher makes use of the method of contrast with the mother tongue or the dominant local language.

This happens particularly when the teacher has to cope with the problem of language interference, when, that is to say, in speaking or writing, children make errors in their use of English which can be traced to the structural, phonological or semantic patterns of their own languages. When this happens, the teacher explains to the child that the pattern he has used would be perfectly acceptable and even worthy of praise if the child were speaking his own language, but that English is a *different* language and would express the same thing in a different way. He then proceeds to teach or revise this different way with the children.

When the English teacher does this, he is fulfilling two educational purposes. First, as we have said, he is teaching English by means of contrast with the local language and this can be quite valuable because we often learn much more effectively by observing contrasts than by observing similarities. Second, and perhaps more important, by stressing that the child's usage would be correct if the child were speaking his mother tongue, the teacher is educating the child into developing a respect for that mother tongue and thus into developing an attitude of respect both for himself as a native speaker of the language and for all other members of the language community. Of course, this attitude of respect is also enhanced by the use of the mother tongue as a means of developing creativity and self-expression, as indicated earlier.

One may perhaps comment on how widespread in the primary school

the uses outlined are. No statistics are available, but the indications are that the first type, the use of the mother tongue or dominant local language as a last resort for teaching, particularly with beginners, is quite common in the schools. Not so common, but still quite frequent, is the use of this language as a means of developing creativity and self-expression. Unfortunately the third use, as a means of developing the child's respect for himself and for his society, is far less common than one would desire. This is because although teachers would be among the first to assert that their pupils should learn to respect themselves for what they are, not many of them fully grasp the importance of the use of contrasts in learning; and quite often, especially when they are not very capable teachers, they are afraid that by using the local language in this way, they would do more damage than good.

This fear of confusing and harming pupils, particularly as far as their use of English is concerned, is not entirely due to teacher inability. It is a community attitude developed in the days of colonialism, when everything pertaining to the European colonial power was thought to be excellent and worthy of imitation and everything local was considered inferior and worthless. The days of European colonialism in West Africa are only in the recent past and community attitudes do not change so easily. What is more important, however, is that this attitude gives rise to a fourth and negative use of the mother tongue, that of its being held up as an object of scorn and derision. Unfortunately, because it arises from a community attitude, this negative use is much more widespread than the positive ones indicated above.

Thus even the youngest children, are given to understand that English is a superior language and that since English is what they have come to school to learn, they must, as far as possible, speak this language and no other. Usually teachers are quite rigorous in enforcing this concept and often it is considered a gross breach of discipline, punishable even by flogging, if a child is caught speaking his mother tongue within the school boundaries, even during playtime.

No teacher ever succeeds in preventing a child from using his mother tongue. What the teacher succeeds in doing instead is to drive the local language underground, where it in fact confuses and retards the young learner of English by making him unaware of differences in pattern between his mother tongue and English; and the child, who, in spite of his teacher, knows that this supposedly inferior language is his only true linguistic possession, begins to see himself as an inferior human being despising the native language which he cannot throw away and striving to achieve a superiority in the use of the foreign tongue that, unless he is exceptional, he can never attain. In addition, because the

child's language is made to be unworthy of respect, the child's native surroundings, even his own home surroundings, become also unworthy of respect and thus teachers, often without realizing it, bring about an unfortunate cleavage between the child and his environment.

In fairness, one must say that this practice is beginning to change. The 'English or nothing' rule is beginning to be enforced less rigorously than it used to be. But Sierra Leone is still a long way from completely ridding itself of this bad educational rule. The only sure way of doing this is to introduce the mother tongues themselves into the schools, as languages both to be taught and to be taught in.

## THE MOTHER TONGUE IN FORMAL POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

### *SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION*

Secondary school continues the linguistic practices of the primary level. The local language is still a last resort medium of communication, although its use as such is comparatively rare as pupils have a greater mastery of some form of English. Here also, the language is used as a means of developing self-expression, of encouraging less forward pupils to express themselves in speaking—this happens particularly during the first year of secondary school. The use this time is again rarer than in the primary school, and when it happens at all, it is often limited to weekly or less frequent periods of story-telling or other easy oral work when pupils, particularly the shy ones, are encouraged to perform with the rest of the class as an audience. However, particularly in the western area, Krio plays are beginning to be staged during school celebrations, as in the primary school.

The use of the local language in teaching English by way of contrast is as rare in the secondary school as it is in the primary, if not rarer and the 'English or nothing' attitude is strong here too. However, some have recognised that the local languages have a place in secondary education and have attempted to include a local mother tongue, usually Mende, as a subject in the school curriculum. The Sierra Leone Grammar School in Freetown included Mende as a subject in the late fifties. However, this attempt, like others of its kind, was shortlived, due to negative community and school attitudes and the lack of suitable literature and works of reference in the language.

If these languages could be recognised subjects for secondary school public examinations, their social prestige would be enormously enhanced. But again, this cannot be done unless suitable literature is available.

*TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES, TRADE SCHOOLS*

Virtually no use is known to be made of the mother tongue for educational purposes in these institutions.

*THE UNIVERSITY*

The University of Sierra Leone consists of two colleges, Fourah Bay College and Njala University College. In these colleges, English is the medium of education as it is in the schools, although here with more justification. Local languages are not taught *per se* although use is often made of them within disciplines and they are subjects for research by individual scholars.

In the English language courses at the Fourah Bay College Department of English Language and Literature, there are two dominant themes. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that all students first have an adequate command of the English Language for internal and external communication and second that they see themselves as English language users in perspective; in group perspectives, in wider country perspectives and in international perspectives. This involves a consideration of the roles of English in Sierra Leone vis-à-vis the mother tongues of the country.

The method of comparison and contrast of English with the mother tongues, which is utilized infrequently in primary and secondary schools, finds its greatest use here. The educational principle is that of cognition, of promoting expertise through understanding and not merely through drill. At university level, the use of the method involves much indirect teaching of the mother tongues themselves. True, there may be more than one mother tongue in the same class, sometimes as many as fifteen of them. But the problem that this might create is eased by the fact that many of these languages belong to the same broad language family and as such exhibit general similarities in phonology and syntax, so that if a teacher knows Mende, Temne or Krio and uses this language for purposes of teaching, he is certain to reach the great majority of his students.

For example, while the educated Englishman in using his language would tend to under-emphasise rather than to over-emphasise, the Sierra Leonean when speaking English would tend to do exactly the opposite. Students, especially at university level, ought to know why. They ought to learn, by means of numerous examples given by the teacher and by other examples elicited from themselves, that emphasis, expressed in phonology by lengthening or by raised pitch and in syntax by repetition, is a structural feature of their mother tongues; that these mother tongue languages may in fact make more than one kind of syntactic use of



emphasis for purposes of thematisation, intensity, distribution, etc. Students may be led to consider ways of expressing in English various meanings that in their mother tongues are expressed by emphatic forms, and, as a result, become both fully and critically aware that in learning English they are trying to cope with a medium that is very different from their native languages and also begin to develop an interest in and desire to explore their own languages; they begin to appreciate the strengths of their mother tongues for expressing meanings pertaining to their culture, meanings which are difficult if not impossible to express in English. Thus they begin to acquire a healthy respect for these mother tongue languages and thereby respect for and pride in themselves as human beings.

In addition, English language teachers at the university level must, on occasion, discuss language in general. In doing so, they need illustrations from various languages, and those most easily appreciated are those which come from the linguistic environment. Here again is another opportunity for indirectly teaching about the mother tongue languages and promoting respect for them, since through such an exercise, students are led to realise empirically that the difference between the mother tongue and English is a healthy difference and that the mother tongue is as respectable as any other language, English included.

The interest thus aroused in the mother tongues of these Fourah Bay College language students is bolstered up by an essay requirement for all final year students to write on some aspect of the use of English or on problems connected with its use in their area or their country of origin. Some students consider English *per se*, for example, describing the use of English in Sierra Leone newspapers or in legal documents, etc. The large majority, however, choose topics that compare some aspects of their mother tongue with English. Their essays often tend to be naive, linguistically speaking. One of the advantages of this exercise is that students develop a sympathy towards their fellow countrymen who, even with education, cannot use English as well as they would expect. They appreciate the full justice of the excuse often given by such people in jest that 'England is not my country, English is not my language'; and they begin to question the necessity of using English in the country as much as officialdom and education demand.

A useful side-effect of this approach to the teaching of English is that the more able graduates are beginning in increasing numbers to go on to graduate studies in linguistics, both within the university and elsewhere. As a result, Sierra Leone is now developing a cadre of language scholars who are researching and studying their own mother tongues. The numbers of these scholars would increase, and thereby their invaluable contribution

to the nation, if the university and the government would carry out more vigorously a policy of promoting the study and recording of the local languages and of encouraging the production of literature in them.

This last point leads to a consideration of the present and future place of language and linguistics within the university. The Sierra Leone Government White Paper on Educational Policy (1970) says:

'The policy of Government is to introduce the teaching of Sierra Leone languages in all schools. As a first step, funds would be made available to Fourah Bay College in 1970/72 at its request to establish a Department (or sub-department) of Applied Linguistics. This Department or sub-department would be asked, in collaboration with the Department of Education, to train teachers of Sierra Leone Languages and to produce literature in these languages in collaboration with the University of Sierra Leone Press and the Publications Unit of the Ministry of Education.'

This policy statement was a triumph for those members of the university staff who had seen the need for the local languages in education and who had, for some years, pressed the government to take action. In this, they were valiantly aided by the officers and members of WALS who, during their Freetown Congress (March 1970), had also convinced top Ministry of Education officials of the necessity for such action. However the policy has not been implemented. The phrase 'at its request' implied that government wanted the university to take the initiative and, for a number of reasons, the University has found itself unable to do so.

However, the university, through its Institute of African Studies, is now actively engaged in deciding upon plans. The Sierra Leone University Press has now committed itself to local language publishing—it is trying to publish a dictionary of Temne and has plans for a scholarly dictionary of Krio in the near future. However, the Press needs more funds if it is to pursue local language publishing as vigorously as it ought to.

## THE MOTHER TONGUE IN ADULT EDUCATION

The most extensive use made of mother tongues has been in the field of adult education. Mother tongue education was started by Christian missionaries—if their converts and would be converts were to become good Christians, they had to be able to sing Christian hymns and to read the Holy Bible and other Christian literature. In practice, this meant being able to read in the mother tongue and consequently considerable effort was directed at teaching reading in the local languages and translating the Bible, hymnbooks, and other religious material into the main

local languages. This is still going on—one of the latest projects not yet completed, is the Sierra Leone Bible Society's attempt to translate the whole Bible into Krio. Today, in addition to the churches, the government (through at least three of its ministries) and various political and voluntary organizations are taking an interest in adult education.

#### *THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND ADULT EDUCATION*

In 1967, the Ministry of Education took over responsibility for adult education and literacy from the Ministry of Social Welfare. It was felt that it was better for adult education to be seen in the light of education as a whole and to be managed within the educational process.

The Adult Education Unit of the Ministry of Education consists of two full time senior officers, a male Education Officer and a female Home Economics Officer, working under the direction of a Principal Education Officer. The latter is also head of the Planning Unit of the Ministry, so that adult education accounts for only half of his work schedule. While this arrangement was probably adequate in 1967, it is now unfortunate because the Planning Unit, which is concerned with the over all educational development, has become so important to the Ministry that it is difficult for the Principal Education Officer to cope effectively with both responsibilities.

The functions of the Adult Education Unit are those of organization, liaison and inspection. The first two are directed at centralizing the resources of all bodies interested in adult literacy work: the Ministries of Works, Agriculture and Social Welfare plus voluntary organizations such as the Provincial Literature Bureau, women's organizations—both religious and socio-political—and Church missions (including Roman Catholic). In areas where voluntary organizations do not function, it is up to the Unit's officers to see that literacy classes are organized.

Regular/regional workshops are held to train adult literacy organizers and teachers. They are usually organized by the Extra-Mural Department of the university in collaboration with the Ministry of Education; workshop leaders are drawn from experienced people in all fields. The aim of the workshops is not limited to training workers; lectures and discussions are usually held for the public in order to convince the people of each region of the need for adult literacy. A recent workshop was held at Kenema, capital of the Eastern Province, in June 1973.

The Unit also aims at providing enough primers and readers for adult literates. For this, it relies almost entirely upon the Provincial Literature Bureau, whose activities are discussed below. However, there is a move towards providing other readers and primers under the aegis of the university's Extra-Mural Department and, as noted earlier, the Sierra



Leone University Press is showing interest. The Extra-Mural Department's work in this regard is again in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. However, little has been accomplished as yet.

The literacy Committee for Adult Education in Freetown, made up of representatives of the Ministry of Education and of other concerned bodies, is a national coordinating and policy-making organism responsible to the Principal Education Officer. There are similarly constituted regional literacy committees (one in each of the country's three provinces) which share the coordinating function.

Adult literacy classes meet three times weekly for thirty weeks per year. Each class lasts two to three hours; they are conducted in three stages. In the pre-literacy stage, emphasis is on practical work, home economics for women and agriculture and allied subjects for men. This is followed by the functional literacy stage during which reading and writing are taught, in relation to the continuing practical work. The final follow-up stage aims at ensuring that the literacy acquired during the second stage remains a permanent possession.

The pattern is good; how far it is followed in practice is another matter. There are always difficulties in organizing useful practical work, particularly since, in spite of the Ministry's efforts, there are still many untrained teachers. Many classes tend to concentrate on reading and writing alone, thus missing the tie-in of literacy with living conditions that the Ministry wishes to emphasize.

Adult literacy teaching is unpaid voluntary work. Money needed for providing materials and equipment for the classes comes direct from the funds of the organization that runs the classes. However, the Ministry of Education now operates a 'food for work' programme, giving teachers regular food allowances, especially of wheatmeal and oil, as a gesture of appreciation and encouragement.

Classes are chiefly conducted in the mother tongue languages; sometimes a transition is made to English when adults have learned to read and write their own languages and in some classes only English is taught. The latter are for office messengers, drivers, etc.; the idea is to provide them with the minimum of English necessary to carry out their jobs effectively.

Figures are not readily available concerning numbers of classes and participants throughout the country—in the Western Area alone, over one thousand participants have been reported, with one of the less populous of the country's twelve provincial districts, the Kambia District, having 353 participants in classes in nine towns and villages. These figures may seem impressive, but seen in the light of a 94 per cent illiteracy rate for a population of two and a quarter million, they indicate the ina-

dequacy of present literacy teaching. One reason for this is that there are only two adult education officers responsible for organizing work in the whole country, whereas for the programme to be fully effective, one would need at least one government officer in each of the twelve provincial districts and two in the Western Area. The effectiveness of the two existing officers is severely restricted. As field officers, their duty is to travel around the country, but they are hampered in this by practical problems such as lack of suitable transport, inadequacy of travelling grants, etc. For the same reasons, it is not easy for the Adult Education Unit to carry out its third function, inspection. Thus, it is difficult to say whether or not classes are properly run, to report on the work done by voluntary organizations, to give advice, guidance, encouragement and on-the-job training to literacy teachers in the field when they need such help, to arrange for the opening of new classes where needed and to recommend the closing of old ones that are not being effective, etc.

From the foregoing, one might jump to the conclusion that the Ministry of Education pays only lip service to the promotion of Adult Literacy and does not really care. Such a conclusion, however, would be hasty and ill-judged. In a developing country where money is a scarce commodity, there are so many demands upon the national purse, even within one single department, that government administrators almost always face a difficult practical problem in ordering their priorities. In such cases, the job of administration, including educational administration, becomes almost impossible and administrators should not be blamed too much if they fail to carry out thoroughly a good plan for the country's development. However the education of adults, like the education of the young, is a *sine qua non* for producing the developed manpower that is a country's greatest economic resource, and therefore, if only in the interest of economic development, adult education should, like school education, be regarded as a matter of urgent priority.

Within the last three or four years, there has been considerable talk in Ministry of Education circles in particular and in government circles generally about functional literacy. The idea is that reading and writing should not be taught as ends in themselves but that they should be tied to immediate agricultural and economic development, even to specific developmental projects. This is the reason for the emphasis on practical work envisaged in the organization of adult literacy classes and indeed, the two senior officers in the adult education unit are appointed with this orientation in mind.

This division of labour between the Education Officer and the Home Economics Officer may be neat and attractive in theory but it does not work out in practice for three reasons. The first two have already been



dealt with—inadequacy of personnel and of money. The third is that any division in terms of agriculture for men and home economics for women is most unrealistic in the context of a country like Sierra Leone where often the women themselves are farmers. In addition, agriculture and home economics by themselves, basic though they may be, are insufficient to meet the country's economic needs which also include industry, trade, and community development generally. This kind of division of labour is a luxury which the country at its present stage of development cannot afford. It would seem that what the country needs, as already stated, is one adult education officer in every district. A good officer of this kind would emphasize training class participants towards economic fulfilment, bearing in mind the needs of both the government and the participants themselves, and would also emphasize reading and writing because without these neither economic development nor other desirable kinds of development can be achieved.

*THE PROVINCIAL LITERATURE BUREAU AND BUNUMBU PRESS—THE 1970 REPORT*

As the only organization in the country concerned *per se* with the promotion of literacy in the mother tongue, the Provincial Literature Bureau deserves special mention. Its double name derives from the fact that it started in the small eastern provincial town of Bunumbu as a printing press primarily for the production and dissemination of Christian literature in the mother tongue languages; at the same time, it was involved to a certain extent in the production of non-religious material and on occasion assumed responsibility for mother tongue literacy teaching.

When the dissemination of mother tongue literature and the teaching function began to be emphasized, the name 'Bunumbu Press' was considered inadequate and was preceded by the name 'Protectorate Literature Bureau', emphasizing the dissemination and teaching as opposed to the printing functions.

The replacement of 'Protectorate' by 'Provincial' was part of a general series of name changes which took place with independence in 1961 and it implied no change in the nature or the functions of the Bureau. The Bureau's continuing aim is to promote literacy actively in all the provincial mother tongues of the country. It normally does not include the Krio Language in its thinking since Krio, though a *lingua franca*, is not a provincial mother tongue. The Bureau is now located at Bo, the largest and most central provincial town in the country.

Although the Bureau, when it started as such, was primarily a religious organization, the then British colonial Government was quick to recognise

the important role it could play in educational development of the country; so, from the start, it was jointly financed by the state and the United Christian Council (an organization embracing all Protestant Churches in the country), although the latter ran it. This is still the position. The Bureau has a management committee consisting of four government members and six United Christian Council members including the chairman and the Bureau's Director.

While religious aims have always been important to it, the Bureau has nevertheless seen itself as the greatest promoter of literacy in the provincial mother tongues and has strained to fulfil its commitment in this regard. However the Bureau has met with far less success than it would like. Its latest available report, that of 1970/71, is clear on the point:

".....Given the necessary effort which was both possible and practicable a majority of the people could have become literate in a generation—in their own languages."

".....Successive Governments have failed the Bureau and the country in four ways:

1. They did not publicly declare their wish to have the whole country literate nor do enough to persuade the Paramount Chiefs to encourage their people to take the opportunity to learn to read and write when it came to them.
2. They did not, and have not, made at least the two main Sierra Leone languages official as far as printed public notices and announcements are concerned.
3. They did not realise that the Bureau needed to develop from the original pioneer effort into a mature organisation with resources equal to the vital part it could have played in a development programme for the less favoured peoples of the country.
4. By its policy of using only the English Language in primary as well as secondary schools the Government has been since 1961, virtually conducting an anti-literacy campaign"

(The report explains this by saying that of the thirty thousand or so children who enter school each year, some twenty-seven thousand leave inadequately literate in English and not literate in any other language, even their own.)

These statements merit comment. The Government has for some time now openly declared its wish to make the whole country literate and has in fact set a target date—1980—for 50 per cent over all literacy. As the

report points out, "Such a declaration must mean literacy in each person's own language. To mean otherwise (i.e. to mean literacy in English) would require the date to be changed to 2080". The report goes on to say that for the 1980 target to be realistic; "we must assume that a change is to be made in the educational policy". Even if this change were made, however, the achievement of the 1980 target will be far from easy.

There is not much evidence that the government is taking practical steps to meet the 1980 target. The 1970 White Paper on Educational Policy talks of "a vigorous programme of adult education, which includes literacy", and states that "the policy of Government is to introduce the teaching of Sierra Leone Languages in all schools". If the target is to be achieved, the government would have to do a great deal more than merely make these statements. One would expect the government to enforce its desire for a Department of Applied Linguistics which would produce grammars and dictionaries, research the languages, produce literature, and help local language teachers. Such a department is necessary because the job that must be done is too big for the Bureau and voluntary agencies to handle unaided. In addition, the government needs to appoint school inspectors particularly concerned with education in the local languages—at present no such officers exist. Through its National Literacy Committee, through these local language school inspectors and through the fourteen Adult Education Officers suggested earlier, the government must organize in depth the teaching of the mother tongues throughout the country, using the Bureau and the University Press and any other available writing and publishing resources for the production and distribution of the necessary printed materials. In addition, through Paramount Chiefs, parliamentary representatives, influential people, and other means, the government must conduct an active propaganda campaign, to convince adults of the advantages to be gained through literacy. It needs to do all this and to find the money with which to do it—and 1980 is not far away.

The government approach seems different from that which the Bureau and language teachers and educators would normally recommend. These educationalists would say that a firm programme for literacy in the mother tongue is the first essential and that every kind of development would follow from this. The government, however, would seem to be taking the approach of identifying economic needs piecemeal and of gearing educational development in the same manner to suit these needs. This appears to be the practice, even if it is not the theory. Thus, for example, the recent emphasis on agriculture as a school subject. Thus, the English classes for office messengers and drivers. Thus, the present scheme by the Ministry of Agriculture for literacy among farmers and

for producing readers to help them to grow better rice in the Northern Province, better oil palm and citrus fruits in the Southern Province and better cacao and coffee in the east.

These piecemeal projects are attractive and they promise quick returns. Yet it would seem much better to push forward a bold plan. Education may be a long-term investment, but, as history has proved, it is one which is more profitable than any other investment, short-term or long-term. Besides, literacy for a stronger labour force, for better and bigger yields of rice, oil palm and citrus, cacao and coffee, for better industry and export trade and for more efficient messengers and drivers—all add up to only one thing, universal literacy. Thus even from a short-term economic point of view, it would be better to start from universal literacy than from that of literacy for specific purposes. And universal literacy would yield much more than specific economic advantages; it would also produce the unquantifiable but invaluable benefit of the education of the mind and spirit and, particularly if it is literacy in the mother tongues, it would yield a richer awareness of culture and perhaps the development of a new civilization.

The 1970/71 Bureau report goes on to give a sad picture of the educational and other wastage that arises from the present insufficient attention given to the country's mother tongues and a pleasant and somewhat idyllic picture of the kind of community that would develop if adequate attention were given. However, idyll or no idyll, no one would doubt that a country where people are literate is a country which develops. One criticism of the Bureau may be that it has paid little or no attention to the Krio Language. Although Krio is not a provincial language and, as a mother tongue in Sierra Leone, ranks only twelfth in importance, its status as *lingua franca* perhaps makes it the most valuable medium for literacy teaching.

In spite of their limitations, the Bureau and its press are quite active. It is an indication of the Bureau's commitment to mother tongue education in general that only 31 of the 124 titles in print in 1970/71 had to do specifically with the Christian faith. The total sales of all its printed materials in that year was 42,710, including 8,560 magazines and newspapers, on 7,952 lesson charts and similar material and 3,049 items classified as 'sundries'. Total sales amounted to over 14,000 pounds sterling. This is not a bad record for a non-profit making organization whose total grants for that year amount to no more than 6,000 pounds sterling, of which nearly 2,000 pounds were devoted exclusively to literacy campaigns.

The literacy campaigns of the Bureau are conducted largely in Mende—and Temne-speaking areas. In April 1973, the Bureau had nine salaried

supervisors, some 65 volunteer workers and was teaching 565 adults, including 115 women. "The Bureau is severely limited by lack of funds in starting new work," says the present Director. "We are attempting to get the chieftdom administrations to help with financial support".

## CONCLUSION

The picture that has been painted here as regards the mother tongue in education in Sierra Leone is the familiar one of need. In government circles, in the Provincial Literature Bureau, in the churches and elsewhere, there is an awareness of this need. There are also attempts at meeting it, attempts which would be more successful if the government would adopt such measures as have been suggested here.

It would be fitting to end by quoting without editing three paragraphs from a letter to the author written by the present Director of the Bureau.

"To help the present Government attain its stated goal of fifty per cent literacy by 1980 will require a Herculean effort by numerous agencies in Sierra Leone. We estimate that fewer than 5 per cent of population is literate in its mother tongue. We know that there is no accurate census to verify this estimate. Our estimate is based on the assumption that a person is literate when he can read and understand printed communication in ordinary speech and can write at a level equal to his reading skill. This skill should encompass 2,000—4,000 words excluding technical and scientific terms.

The Bureau believes that the learning of English can be successfully accomplished only after the Mother Tongue has been mastered. We have tested secondary school students with material written in a controlled vocabulary of fifty words and have found that many of them cannot read it. Many students up to Class Seven (i.e. the end of Primary school education) do not know the difference between vowels and consonants. We also feel that the Mother Tongue will not be learned if it is not introduced formally into the primary school curriculum.

We do not believe that English should ever replace the vernacular language for the majority of Sierra Leone citizens. The ethnic and cultural identity of the people is closely bound to the stories, proverbs and folk tales. These now exist precariously in the oral tradition. As the oral tradition is not likely to be perpetuated we must make sure that a printed literature and the ability to read it are priority projects in Sierra Leone."



# 4 Language and Education in Dahomey

Qlabiyi Yai

## INTRODUCTION

### *LANGUAGE SITUATION*

Any scientific study of the language situation in an African state or group of states which sets out to provide a basis for future action and proposes a new language policy rather than being simply descriptive should be based on a correct linguistic profile of the state or states concerned. Such a profile presupposes at least:

- 1) —a complete list of all the languages spoken in the country or countries in question, including their dialectal variations;
- 2) —an assessment of the number of native speakers of each language;
- 3) —an assessment of the degree of bilingualism at least and if possible of the degree of trilingualism or multilingualism;
- 4) —a linguistic atlas.

Few if any of the countries of tropical Africa come very close to meeting these basic criteria. Population censuses, which are generally recognized as the basis for determining such criteria, are rare and often badly organized, and as people in general are politically and psychologically unprepared for them and do not understand their purpose, the results are often of doubtful value, only very imperfectly representative and regarded with suspicion even by those responsible for organizing and carrying out the project. Any discussion of the linguistic profile of African countries—and this is certainly the case for Dahomey—must therefore begin with an admission of shortcomings and of imprecision. Having said this, and bearing these shortcomings constantly in mind, we now venture to offer the following profile of the language situation in Dahomey.

The last population census in Dahomey took place in 1961. By extrapolation from the demographic trends shown by the census, it has been estimated that in 1973 the country's 112,000 sq. km. of territory supported a population of 2,948,000, and in 1974, some 3,029,000. The very high

proportion of young people should be noted: 46 per cent of the population are under 15 years old.

As regards the number of languages spoken, Dahomey would be classified as an African State "of average linguistic heterogeneity"<sup>1</sup>. All the languages used in Dahomey belong to the Niger-Congo family identified by Joseph Greenberg<sup>2</sup>. It includes the following groups and sub-groups:—the Fon-Aja group and its dialects: *Mahi, Gun, Seto, Tori, Aizo, Watchi, Kotafon, Mina, Pla, Pedé, etc.*—Yoruba and its dialects:—*Ketu, Şabe, Işá, Idaşá, Itakete, Pobé, Ifé, etc.*—Bariba—Gurma—Berba—Natimba—Betamaribe—Somba—Pila—Fulfulde—Dompago—Dendi and the dialects spoken in the towns of Djougou, Parakou, Kandi and Malanville.

The 1961 census gives the following figures for some of these languages:

|            |   |         |
|------------|---|---------|
| —Pila      | : | 59,000  |
| —Fulfulde  | : | 32,000  |
| —Dendi     | : | 30,000  |
| —Bariba    | : | 150,000 |
| —Yoruba    | : | 200,000 |
| —Fon group | : | 800,000 |

But even as rough estimates, these figures are misleading on two counts: firstly, they are 12 years out of date and secondly, they cover only those over 15 years of age. As has already been pointed out, the under-fifteens represent 46 per cent of the population and the importance of this age group in education need not be emphasized.

It is very difficult to say which are the most dynamic languages in Dahomey. As no figures are available, we can give only a sketchy account. Apart from languages spoken on the frontiers with Togo, Upper Volta and Nigeria, which are of secondary importance, five languages may be considered to be in common use: Fon, Yoruba, Dendi, Fulfulde and Hausa. Four of these are used in other states and one (Fon) is used only in Dahomey. Hausa is also spoken in Nigeria and Niger, Yoruba in Nigeria and to some extent in Togo, Dendi in Niger and Mali (Sonrhail dialect) and Fulfulde in practically all the states of West Africa.

Socio-linguistic factors (the economic progress, enterprise and dynamism of their native speakers) indicate that certain languages may tend to be more dynamic than others. Thus Fon and Yoruba seem to have a lead on other languages and dialects in urban areas in the south, the first on account of the large number of its users who work in the civil service

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Alexandre, *Langues et langues en Afrique noire*, Paris, Payot, 1967, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Greenberg, *Languages of Africa*. The Hague, Mouton, 1966

and business and the second owing to the leading position occupied by the Yoruba in commerce.

Dendi appears to be more and more emerging as the vehicular language in towns in the north. The importance of the role of Dendi in commerce is largely responsible for this state of affairs.

But we cannot say with any authority that these trends are here to stay. It would be even more dangerous to try to establish a hierarchy of languages which are gaining ground and those which are marking time or dying out. Such risky assumptions are ruled out in this field for at least two reasons: firstly, because all we have said above is based more on impressions than on scientifically established data; and secondly and mainly, because there is still a very strong feeling of loyalty towards the mother tongue, other languages often being used only in special situations, for example at the market. The languages which we have described as dynamic are still not vehicular languages such as are used in every aspect and activity of everyday life.

Bilingualism, both internal and external, is therefore a relatively common phenomenon, although it decreases rapidly as one descends the age scale and suddenly disappears altogether.

The term internal bilingualism indicates that the speaker of the language speaks two, three or more dialects of that language. Thus it is not unusual to find southern Dahomeans of 30 years and over speaking Fon and Mina, Mahi and Fon, Mahi, Fon and Mina, Aja and Mina, etc. without ever confusing the different dialects.

The term external bilingualism is used when an individual speaks or understands his own language and a language belonging to a different group. This would be true of a Yoruba who speaks or understands Gun or Mina, of a Dendi who speaks Bariba or of one of the Fulani who speaks Dendi. This phenomenon can be observed in individuals of 45 and over and when the different languages are spoken in adjacent areas. It can also be observed in civil servants in their 40's or 50's who, particularly during the colonial era, were required to work for long periods as nurses, clerks, teachers, etc. in different regions of Dahomey.

We could not close this brief account of the language situation in Dahomey without mentioning foreign languages. French is the main foreign language in Dahomey. It has established itself in a privileged position in education, primarily by its use as a language of instruction, and therefore requires separate treatment. It will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter. English, German and Spanish all come a long way behind French. All we need say is that although they are taught at secondary level, the impact which these languages have on the few Dahomeans who have access to them is negligible. As teaching methods are generally

very academic, pupils are only interested in German, Spanish and even English to the extent that they are subjects which count quite a lot in examinations, and forget them as soon as they have their diploma. There is a well-known story in Dahomey of a baccalauréat-holding civil servant who in spite of his seven years of English is unable to make himself understood in that language in neighbouring Nigeria where he is obliged to use Yoruba or other international languages used in Dahomey in the shops.

As for Spanish and German, which unlike English are never likely to be used, even sporadically, by the Dahomeans who have painfully acquired them in their lycées and secondary schools, they become in effect dead languages for our pupils as soon as they leave school. To keep them in the curriculum as compulsory subjects is a luxury Dahomey can ill afford.

The position of Arabic is slightly different from that of other foreign languages. Although it resembles them in that it affects only a small number of Dahomeans, it is taught on a different basis and for other motives. It is not taught in the official school system but in Koranic schools; but the instruction given in these schools is not language teaching as such and most pupils would be incapable of conversing in Arabic. It should be mentioned, however, that in recent years more and more Dahomean Muslims have been sent to Universities in Cairo and other cities of the Middle East to be educated in Arabic and Arabic literature and in Muslim theology. Also worthy of mention are the primary schools set up by certain Muslim communities in the south of Dahomey with technical assistance from Arab States: Arabic is a compulsory subject in these schools from the first year onwards when it is not used as the language of instruction.

We might therefore sum up the language situation in Dahomey as follows: Dahomean languages are very much alive at grass roots level but in the absence of systematic and enlightened encouragement or, by and large, of conditions favouring the standardization of groups of dialects, it will probably be a long time before any is accepted as a *lingua franca*. Some are more dynamic than others but it is impossible at this stage to predict the final outcome. The dialect of the Fon group spoken in Ouidah, for instance, appears to be making headway and may eventually become the basis for standard Fon. This marked centripetal movement is encouraged by urbanization and by the status enjoyed by speakers of the Ouidah dialect who have always formed a large proportion of the technical and managerial class in Dahomey, although other variants, such as the dialect spoken in Abomey, albeit not very different from that spoken in Ouidah, are felt to be "purer" or "more authentic". The

Yoruba dialect spoken in Porto-Novo, which is practically the same language as standard Nigerian Yoruba, is a common code for this group. In the other language groups these trends are less marked.

Bilingualism, which was so important in Dahomey in pre-colonial times and even during the first decades of colonization, is becoming less common, particularly in intellectual circles where it seems to develop in inverse proportion to age and command of the language used at school.

## THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN EDUCATION

a) THE USE OF DAHOMEAN LANGUAGES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION Education in the modern sense of the word began with colonization. It is therefore to be expected that the language of instruction should be the language of the colonial power. French is Dahomey's official language and its almost unchallenged sway is reflected in education, where it is used from the infant school to university. The prestige of the French language was unaffected by independence, as French is still essential for success and a *sine qua non* for promotion in the civil service.

During the colonial period, the teacher was allowed and generally obliged to use the most drastic methods to make a Dahomean child speak French properly. This was the origin of the notorious "signal", a wooden object which enabled the teacher to identify all the pupils who had been caught talking a language other than French. At the end of each day the teacher asked who had the "signal" and as each named the classmate from whom it had been passed on to him the teacher was able to identify all the pupils who had spoken their mother tongue during the day, a crime for which punishment, often corporal punishment, was inflicted.

The "signal" has now disappeared from our schools, but only because more rational, sophisticated teaching methods make it superfluous. In fact, many more people speak French now than 30 or 40 years ago. Civil servants and office-workers of all ranks suffer from a linguistic complex and make a point of speaking French to their children at home, thus making the ordeal of the "signal" an anachronism. But the signal could not completely solve the Dahomean teacher's problem of teaching in a language which was not the child's own. In other words he had to teach the young Dahomean the content (instruction) and the instrument (language) at one and the same time. Our teachers soon learned from experience that the young Dahomean cannot be taught French or mathematics in the same way as a young Parisian. In order to escape this contradiction, of which they were fully aware, they often had recourse to translation, particularly in the lower classes of primary schools. The Dahomean languages which were banished from the playground



by means of the signal were thus introduced into the classroom by the master, rather against his will.

Thus some degree of bilingualism was, and still is, practised, if not preached, in primary schools. But it was an unsystematic, watered-down, almost mutilated form of bilingualism. This was mainly because the teacher felt almost guilty about it; he used it somewhat surreptitiously as it was not recommended in any teaching handbook. On the contrary, all the rules and regulations stated expressly that French alone should be used. The second factor working against the systematic use of bilingualism was that the teacher did not always speak his pupils' language. When he was not from the same region or the same linguistic group and had not lived long enough in the area to master its language, even the most tentative use of bilingualism was impossible. This was the position of several teachers originating in the south who worked in northern Dahomey.

An exception to this rule were some Yoruba-speaking areas of central Dahomey (Dassa, Savè), where, towards the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, schools were established by Methodist ministers of British nationality. As in neighbouring Nigeria, they decided that teaching should be in Yoruba for the first two or three years of primary school. Unfortunately they were forced to put a stop to this experiment, not because it had proved unsuccessful but in order to obtain official recognition of their schools and to conform to standard practice in the colony.

Although Dahomean languages were not taught in the official education system, they could be and often were introduced in certain regions by denominational schools. Thus both Catholic and Protestant schools used to give one hour's religious instruction a day in Fon and Yoruba. As these courses were held after school hours, children from lay schools could attend classes given in Dahomean languages with their friends from the religious schools if their parents so wished. The great majority of non-Muslim school children attended these courses, under pressure from their teachers, who were generally Christian.

To all these should be added the "Sunday schools" held in Gun (Porto Novo), Yoruba (in areas where this language was spoken) and Mina (Cotonou and certain areas of the Mono) which were organized by Protestant missions.

Although Dahomean languages are not taught as subjects and still less used as a vehicle of instruction in schools, they re-appear in extra-curricular activities. Games, playlets and plays are organized by the teachers in Dahomean languages, particularly on such occasions as the school's open day and end-of-year festivities. All these activities

enable the young Dahomean to improve his knowledge of his mother tongue and to practise it, and make him realize that it can be a cultural medium; but by restricting the mother tongue to oral use (the written form being used very rarely) and by banishing it from education, they tend to confirm the young schoolchild's feeling that his mother tongue is a second-class language, suitable for fringe activities. In short, they perpetuate the linguistic inferiority complex.

Recently, however, experiments in the teaching of the mother tongue (Fon) in the town of Cotonou have proved satisfactory. These experiments, which were carried out in Catholic primary schools, aroused great interest among the children and they experienced very little difficulty in learning to read and write a language with which they were already familiar. These experiments not carried further for lack of official encouragement, but they proved that such teaching is possible, and in the Dahomean context this is a step forward.

To conclude our account of primary education, we can say that none of the 212,978 Dahomean school children<sup>3</sup> is officially taught in his mother tongue.

b) DAHOMEAN LANGUAGES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION The official neglect of Dahomean languages noted in primary education is even more painfully obvious at secondary level. This is not surprising in view of the fact that even in countries such as Nigeria, where the child's mother tongue is used as the vehicle of instruction at the primary level, it slips back after the second or third year to become just one subject among others. Thus, the more knowledge is acquired, the less the mother tongue is used and use of the mother-tongue is therefore inversely proportional to the scope and complexity of the content of the education. If this trend has been observed in countries such as Nigeria, how much more so is it the case in Dahomey!

At secondary level, there is far less marginal-use of Dahomean languages than even at primary level. Although secondary school pupils may put on plays in Dahomean languages in their villages during the holidays, they no longer receive religious instruction in their mother tongue. French is felt to be the only language capable of expressing the abstract metaphysical content of Christian and Muslim theology at this level, and in any case the ethnic diversity in secondary classes is such that they no longer have the linguistic homogeneity which would allow schools

<sup>3</sup>This figure was supplied by the National Commission for Educational Reform in Dahomey which met in May 1973. Cf. its report entitled *Structures actuelles du système éducatif*, p. 13.

to give religious instruction in a Dahomean language even if they wanted to.

Since 1970, however, a surge of nationalist feeling among secondary school pupils has led to moves towards making good this deficiency. They asked the authorities for classes in Dahomean languages. At the time, the Ministry tended to take a *laissez-faire* attitude. It gave its agreement in principle and, apparently trying to go one better, even made an official statement to the effect that it intended to organize official classes in Dahomean languages at secondary level, making the inadequacy of research in these languages its sole pretext for not putting its intentions into practice.

As a result, courses were given at the Lycée Mathieu Bouké at Parakou and at the Lycée Béhanzin at Porto-Novo from 1970. At Parakou, the classes were held twice a week, on Thursday and Saturday afternoons. They consisted of conversation, story reading, the collecting and interpretation of proverbs and transcription exercises. The languages chosen were Bariba and Fon; from outside the school, people interested in Dahomean languages and able to read and write them, as well as members of the teaching staff, were selected to teach them.

At the Lycée Béhanzin, Porto-Novo, three languages were taught: Fon, Dendi and Yoruba. The Fon classes began late owing to difficulty in recruiting teachers. They consisted only of conversation, story reading, and the collecting and interpretation of proverbs. The Dendi classes were intended only for pupils who did not speak the language. They were in the main conversation and translation classes, based on topics drawn from everyday life. Yoruba was taught at two classes: classes for non-Yoruba, the content of which resembled that of the Dendi classes, with the important difference that textbooks were available; and classes intended for Yoruba which concentrated on mastery of the written language and then on the teaching of Yoruba history and literature.

In general, these classes were very well attended, particularly at the beginning, but members gradually dwindled and by mid-April the courses had more or less ground to a halt. The reasons for this pattern of events are not hard to find:

—first of all, the fact that the classes were not included in the official timetable, but were held on days and at times when the pupils are normally off school;

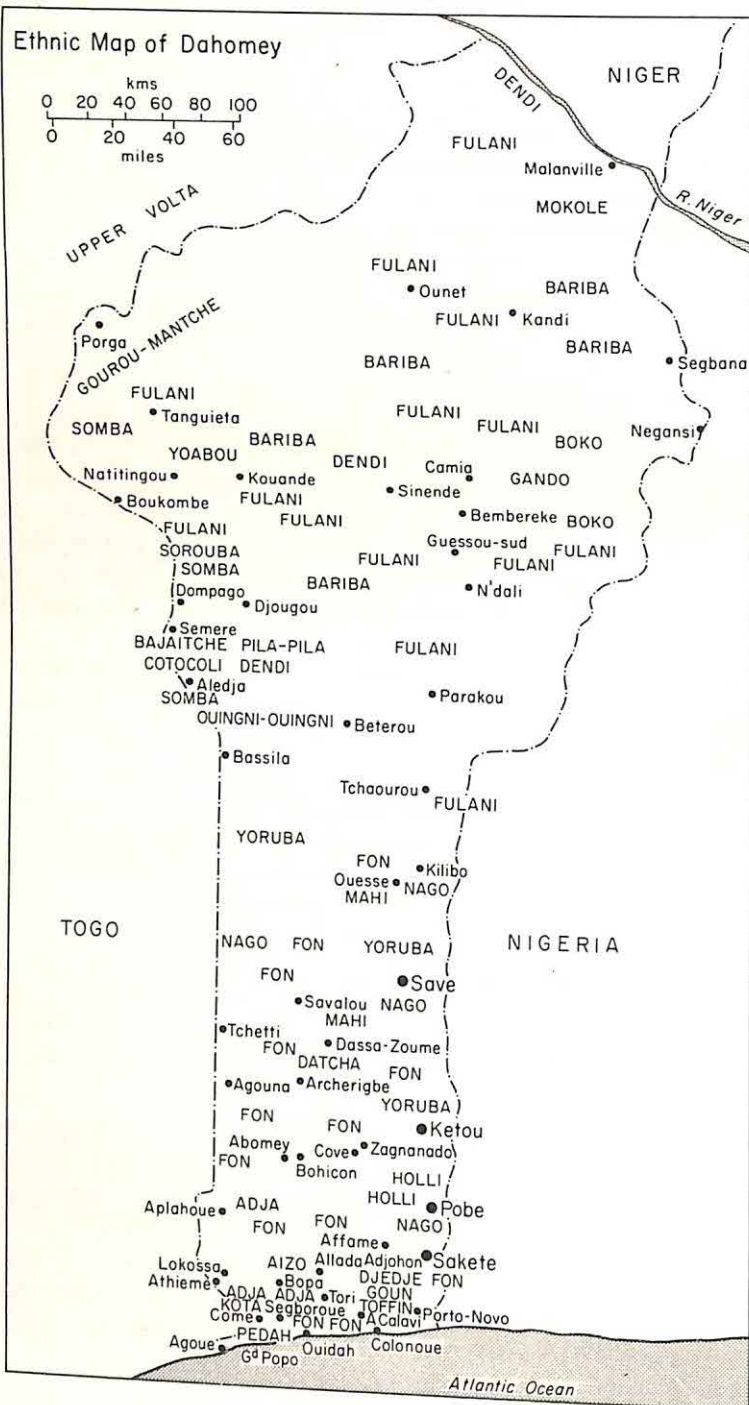
—secondly, because no tests or official examinations were held, the few exercises that were set did not affect their progress at school, as good marks did not count in deciding if they should go up to the next class, and bad marks did not prevent them from doing so. No-one who is familiar with the opportunist attitude of pupils towards cur-

riculum subjects—an attitude which is dictated by the utilitarian philosophy permeating the whole educational system—will be surprised that the enthusiasm shown at the beginning very soon faded;—lastly, the teachers' lack of training was another reason for the limited success of the teaching of Dahomean languages at secondary level. The teacher realized after the first few weeks that he had already exhausted his material. After an introduction to the alphabet and reading and the discussion of a few proverbs, the course became monotonous and repetitive.

These shortcomings should not however lead us to conclude that the experiment was a failure. It was a beginning and, as such, of considerable value. Its very insufficiencies have helped to make both students and teachers more aware of the nature of the problem and the immensity of the task. It has given both a clearer idea of the path to be followed: any serious approach to the teaching of our languages must be based on scientific research into the languages in question and requires thorough training of staff and suitable textbooks. In short, we are beginning—but only beginning—to appreciate the difference between goodwill and serious rational work, between amateurism and the scientific approach.

c) DAHOMEAN LANGUAGES AT UNIVERSITY No Dahomean language is represented at the University of Dahomey either in teaching or in research. This may be because our university is only three years old but also, and more to the point, because the French model has been adopted almost without modification on the arts side. The science of linguistics has still not managed to get its credentials accepted at the University of Dahomey. There was a token course (one hour a week) in general linguistics in 1970-1971, and an almost equally insubstantial course in French linguistics. A number of research papers have however been written on Dahomean languages, some as degree work at universities outside Dahomey and some done outside universities. They include a phonological analysis of Fon; a study of Fon tones, a thesis on the tonal system of Gun, a general introduction to Fon oral literature, a Fon-French dictionary, several basic grammars of Fon, an Aja-French dictionary, a Bariba dictionary, a Bariba grammar, a study of the Boko language, etc.

Dahomean languages were to be taught in the Department of Legal and Economic Sciences during the 1973-1974 university year. Dendi, Fon and Yoruba will be taught to those who do not speak these languages to enable future civil servants to communicate with their clients. This is a good idea which will be judged by its results. Plans to teach Dahomean languages in the Department of Literary and Linguistic Studies will be referred to later.





Thus in the educational system as a whole, from the primary stage to higher education, Dahomean languages are conspicuous by their absence. On the rare occasions when they do crop up, it is either because of methodological necessity (although the written form is hardly ever used) or a gratuitous act of generosity. No truly national education can be based on such attitudes. We can therefore state that the education system appears to be blissfully unaware of Dahomean languages.

### DAHOMÉAN LANGUAGES AND ADULT EDUCATION

It is generally accepted that the expression "national education" is not to be taken literally in African countries. Education is national in name only, whether considered from the point of view of the number and the functions of the various bodies responsible for providing it or from the point of view of its content and relevance to the life and needs of the country in question. We must therefore also examine the role of our languages in education provided on a non-formal, non-systematic basis. Although the situation here cannot be represented as being the opposite of that prevailing in the formal education system, it must be admitted that the picture is slightly different. The official figure for illiteracy in Dahomey is 95.4 per cent (92.3 for men, 98.4 for women).<sup>4</sup> It is true that this figure in fact represents non-attendance at school, as literacy and school attendance are considered synonymous in Dahomey. Those who can neither read nor write French are considered illiterate.

Inaccurate though it is, the figure given by the Statistics Department gives a fairly clear indication of the great mass of Dahomeans who are at present unable to read or write. For there are very few people in Dahomey who either read or write their mother tongue: a generous estimate would be between 1 and 2 per cent. We are not trying to minimize the work and the results achieved by the institutions which in the past endeavoured to teach the reading and writing of our languages. On the contrary, to the extent that the meagreness of their results reflects their heroic efforts in the face of the hostility of the administration and the incomprehension and recalcitrance of the prospective beneficiaries of their teaching, they have our full appreciation as they have enabled us better to understand the difficult nature and the vast scale of the work remaining to be done.

Many institutions are now at work in the field of adult literacy. They are generally private organizations whose aims, motives and methods

<sup>4</sup>According to the population survey (Statistics Department) referred to in the document of the National Commission for Educational Reform in Dahomey entitled *Structures actuelles du système éducatif*, op. cit. p. 46.



vary. Most of the credit for adult literacy work is traditionally given to the missions, as state and similar organizations did not join in this work until very recently.

Three stages can be distinguished in the literacy work of the missions:

1) A stage of expansion: in order to spread the Gospel among the Dahomean population, missionaries started intensive literacy work in the mother tongue, at least in certain regions. The Protestant missions were the most active during this period.

2) A stage when literacy work stagnated or even declined<sup>5</sup>. As state education progressed, literacy work in the Dahomean languages slackened; the "literate" population being able to understand the Gospel more easily in French, literacy work in the Dahomean languages could be cut back without great danger.

3) A renewal of interest in Dahomean languages: shortly before independence, Christian missions which were late arrivals on the scene began to show great enthusiasm for functional literacy work (for evangelization purposes) in areas, especially in Northern Dahomey, which had not yet been covered. These were mainly American Protestant missions (the Sudan Interior Mission). The Catholic Church had realized its backwardness in this respect, and perhaps not wishing to appear to support colonial obscurantism, showed renewed interest in our languages, especially after independence. To these bodies can be added certain non-missionary organizations which in very recent years have begun to use Dahomean languages within the framework of rural development work.

In order to give a clearer picture of the use of Dahomean languages in adult education, we shall now examine in more detail some of the religious and lay institutions to which we have just referred, giving an account of their objectives, methods and results.

The Methodist missions were among the very first bodies to show an interest in educating adults in their own language. Teams from the *Eglise Protestante Méthodiste* of Dahomey are at present carrying out literacy operations in Porto-Novo, Ouidah, Segboroué, Abomey, Bohicon, Dassa and Savè. With this fairly long-established tradition of literacy work, a considerable number of members of the Methodist Church are at least able to read Dahomean languages.

<sup>5</sup>Evidence of this decline can be seen in the fact that there is no newspaper worthy of the name published in Dahomean languages today whereas in the 30s there was a weekly entitled "Iwe Ajase". It had the advantage of being a bilingual newspaper (Yoruba-French), and therefore played an educational role. Its fourth page consisted of a French vocabulary with translations into Yoruba, Fon and Gungbe which apart from its lexicological value, had the political advantage of contributing to national unity.

As was to be expected, men were the first to benefit from literacy work, but special efforts have been made over the last ten years to involve women. At Dassa-Zoumé and Savè, literacy instruction is given in Yoruba with textbooks imported from Western Nigeria (*Twé Kíkà fun àwon Agbà*). Useful courses in arithmetic, hygiene, child care and home economics are given in conjunction with the literacy instruction.

Twelve villages in the Bohicon—Abomey area are covered by the literacy operation which was started at the beginning of 1972. Classes are mixed and numbers are limited to ten per class. The textbook used is the well known Fon syllabary *Cavi fogbe to* (the key to Fon), in two parts. Once this first stage has been mastered, the pupils move on to readers:

- Xa fõgbe gãji (Let's read Fon)
- Fite azõ le no gosí (On the origin of different diseases)
- Mawu to mitõ (God our father)
- Ahã kplá Kõjo yi to mɛ (On alcoholism)

Eight or nine books are used in all. Extracts from the Gospels (a series of ten leaflets), a book on hygiene and a textbook for training in crop farming and animal husbandry are at the press.

The Sudan Interior Mission operates in the northern areas. Its literacy teams work in Yom (Pila-Pila), Dompago, Bariba, Busa, Boko and Fulani.

Yom is used in the area around Djougou. In all, 15 villages are covered by the operation which began in 1952. *Tõ kar Yom* (Let's read Yom), a syllabary in six parts, is used as textbook. There is also a reader: *Yom Karun* (Readings in Yom).

Literature written in Yom consists in the main of works on religious themes and translations of the Scriptures. Copies of eight or nine such works have been duplicated, as has the as yet incomplete translation of the New Testament.

In order to prevent those who have followed literacy classes from relapsing immediately into illiteracy, a two-page newspaper, "Yom Faajimba" (Yom News) has been launched. Its average circulation is 150 and 18 issues have so far been published.

Adult literacy work in Dompago, which was also started in 1952, seems to have been even more successful than literacy work in Yom. More than 1,000 people have attended classes. Here too, apart from the syllabary and reader, literature is of Christian origin: history of the Church, Gospel according to Saint Mark, ... etc. There is also a two-page newspaper published in Dompago, "Faaci".

Work in Bariba began after the Second World War and led to the preparation of a syllabary in eight parts and a reader. Since then, there has

been a constant and increasing flow of literature in Bariba. There is also a Bariba newspaper.

Research into Busa and Boko—two variations of a single language spoken in both Nigeria and Dahomey—began in 1954-1955. An unpublished *Analysis of Boko* has been prepared by an American linguist. On it have been based a two-volume syllabary and book on how to write the language, adapted to the method used in the syllabary. Nine classes are held in all, in seven villages, the largest of which, Segbana, has two classes. Seven booklets of Christian literature and one book for women, *Gbem Zoomo Aafia N Neo Aafia Taala* (Health and motherhood), are used. Handbooks on flies and different types of plants are also being prepared.

The Sudan Interior Mission is involved in literacy work in Fulani in the Fulani-speaking enclaves around Kandi and Segbana. A syllabary based on the regional dialect of Fulani, *Pullo O Waawar Janguo* (1962), is being used with satisfactory results. Post-literacy work is based on books published in Cameroon in the Fulani dialect spoken in the Adamawa region which is understood perfectly by the Dahomean Fulani.

The literacy experiments carried out by the *Société Nationale pour le Développement Rural* (SONADER) and the Swiss Technical Assistants Programme on behalf of the *Société Nationale Agricole pour le Coton* (SONACO) are interesting for two reasons.

—organized by government bodies or partly financed and supervised by the government, these experiments can be regarded as test cases which reflect the official attitude to the problem of dealing with illiteracy. They also demonstrate in a nutshell the problems which the authorities will have to tackle if a general and systematic literacy policy is undertaken among the rural population of Dahomey; —as their motivation and purpose differ from those of the literacy operations carried out by the missions, and as they are aimed at a potentially larger audience and are closely linked with the essential needs, concerns and activities of the rural population at large, they reflect its attitudes and aspirations.

By bringing the administrators face to face with those under their jurisdiction and the masses face to face with the élite in an Africa in a state of social turmoil, they demonstrate more clearly that literacy work is a political and social necessity, a *sine qua non* of modern culture. Literacy work as undertaken by the missionaries, on the other hand, may sometimes appear to be a luxury, restricted in its audience and its aims, because it is directed towards present or potential members of the same church and because its essential function is to pass on the Christian message.

SONADER began literacy experiments in its co-operatives in the Grand Agonvi in April 1971. Two languages are spoken in this area, Fon and Yoruba. Work with Yoruba was started first as both staff and material were readily available. The organizer and director of the work was a sociologist, assisted by a Yoruba lady teacher who had had several years' teaching experience in Nigeria.

After the literacy instructors, selected by competitive examination from villagers who had learnt to read and write Yoruba at the missions, had been through a training course, classes were started in twelve villages. After one year, operations were extended to include neighbouring villages. Members of the co-operative are offered a two-hour course every day after working hours. The literacy instructor, who is himself a member of the co-operative, is paid 125 francs for two hours, which is the equivalent of a day's wages in a SONADER co-operative.

The "alawiye" series of textbooks was chosen although it was originally intended for use with Nigerian school children. It takes the co-operative members two years to work through the six-volume series. Since the aim of the course in this case is to familiarize the pupils with the handling of letters and numbers, it consists of reading, writing, dictation, arithmetic, etc.

After one year, a co-operative magazine "Alájùmòse" (The Co-operative Worker) was launched on the initiative of the sociologist in charge. There were four pages to begin with but now there are six. So far, four numbers have been published, all in 1972. The paper has a circulation of 300 and costs 10 francs. It is owned by the co-operative members themselves, who also contribute a large proportion of the articles. It contains short articles on hygiene and agricultural technology, extracts from the statutes of the co-operative, short stories, poems and miscellaneous news items. In all, 400 to 500 co-operative workers have benefited from these operations.

Literacy work in Fon began in the Grand Agonvi co-operatives at the beginning of 1972 when two pilot classes of about 40 pupils were formed. The aims, methods and timetables were the same as those of the Yoruba classes. After one year the workers were able to read Fon fluently. Locally available textbooks were used, pending a standardization of the Fon alphabet. Work was to begin on a wider basis on October 1973.

The functional literacy operation being carried out in the "village producer groups" in the Borgou area (northeast Dahomey) is similar but on a larger scale.

Functional literacy was first introduced in this area in 1969-1970 in co-operatives sponsored by the Swiss Co-op. The aim was to teach members of village producer co-operatives to read and write in order

to encourage them to take a more active part in economic affairs and to enable them to assume responsibility for production, purchase and sale within their groups. As the objective of the operation was integrated development, it adopted the opposite approach to that of most literacy work: first, an introduction to the co-operative movement and marketing (including instruction in the use of certain instruments such as the scales), then reading and writing. This programme, which was first used with the Bariba language, is now being tried out with other languages used in the Borgou. Its technical and educational objectives can be divided into three stages as shown in the table reproduced below.

| STAGES | TECHNICAL OBJECTIVES   | EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES  |
|--------|--|---|
| A      | Presentation of co-operative ideas and principles<br><i>Marketing of products</i><br>weighing detailed accounts<br>deduction of credits for the agricultural season and for agricultural equipment | <i>Number—weight—money</i><br>presentation of the decimal system and arithmetic<br>exercises preparing for reading writing                    |
| B      | <i>Management</i><br>keeping sales and stock books<br>keeping a cash book detailed accounts (seasonal credits)<br>detailed accounts (credits for agricultural equipment)                           | <i>Arithmetic</i><br>introduction to figures<br>addition, subtraction with a carrying figure<br>reading a calendar<br>elementary book-keeping |
| C      | <i>Further training</i><br>Extension work<br>Reading technical documents<br>keeping all documents reading the bulletin, leaflets, etc.<br>keeping the farming calendar                             | <i>Reading</i><br><i>Writing</i><br>reading and writing in the vernacular<br>formation of study groups  |

Adult education in Dahomey is thus organized by different bodies for different purposes and lacks cohesion and direction. Problems connected with the absence of a coherent and purposeful policy in this sphere are:

practical problems: shortage of premises for literacy teaching; inadequate teacher training; often unsuitable textbooks; insufficient staff;

socio-political problems: once they can read and write and particularly once they can handle figures, many country people prefer to leave



the villages to take up apprenticeships in the towns, while others seek office jobs in the civil service because they feel that the ability to read and write confers upon them the status of a lower-middle-class white collar worker.

In spite of the missionaries' efforts to provide the newly literate trained on denominational functional literacy courses with reading material, their needs are not fully catered for. In two years, one can read the Bible or the Gospels several times over. This accounts for the popularity of Yoruba newspapers, magazines and comics from Nigeria<sup>6</sup>.

Notwithstanding these undoubtedly complex problems, the literacy work of the churches and of lay organizations has played and continues to play a positive role and is a good foundation for further progress. It has been assisted by recent events which have made the population more aware of the problem of the use of African languages and which promise well for the future.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

a) THE COMMISSION NATIONALE DE LINGUISTIQUE This commission was established on 6 January 1972. Its general objectives are as follows:

"to break down the isolation of individual research workers and co-ordinate their work;

to organize a seminar either at national level or at regional level (i.e. with other African States), on the transcription of Dahomean languages;

to study the literature and culture of which our languages are the vehicle with a view of integrating them into our educational system;

to draw up a ten-year programme for the promotion of African languages in collaboration with Unesco...<sup>7</sup>"

The commission is a non-official voluntary body and open to all those interested in Dahomean languages, from whatever angle. It is governed by a committee of six consisting of a chairman, two vice-chairmen, a secretary, an assistant secretary and a publications secretary.

It now has five sub-committees which deal with Fon, Yoruba, Bariba, the Atakora languages and Aja.

These sub-commissions have each worked out their own programme within the framework of the general objectives defined above. For example, where there was no alphabet or standardized system of spelling,

<sup>6</sup>The popularity of the "Atoka" series of photo-strip novels among literate Yoruba in Porto-Novo and Contonou is a clear sign of the desire for reading material in the mother tongue.

<sup>7</sup>See the invitation to the constituent meeting, dated 6 December 1971, published in the Bulletin of the National Commission for Unesco, third special number.

the first task was a phonological analysis of the language with a view to its transcription. This work is now in hand, and the tremendous task of awakening public awareness and counteracting feelings of linguistic inferiority is being undertaken. A seminar on the standardization of the alphabets of Dahomean languages held in April 1974 was to be attended by representatives of all the neighbouring states (Niger, Nigeria, Togo and Upper Volta) and of Ghana.

In the meantime, work was already being undertaken in certain languages: a Fon syllabary, a Fon reader's guide for literates, a Fon grammar, works on Fon proverbs, Fon numeration, a Bariba grammar, a French-Bariba dictionary (in process of publication), a collection of Bariba stories, a linguistic atlas of the Borgou area and plans for rural newspapers in Yoruba, Fon and Bariba<sup>8</sup>.

In spite of, or rather because of, the goodwill of its members, the National Commission for Linguistics has come up against several serious problems. Its difficulties spring in the main from the fact that although it works for the public good, it has not been officially recognized as an institution serving the public interest and has no financial resources. The members of the different sub-committees also live some distance from each other, which does not make co-ordination any easier. It should be added that, although goodwill is essential, more is required to make a linguist. The commission lacks qualified linguists.

b) THE PROMISES HELD OUT BY THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM The second development which seems likely to encourage the use of our languages is the educational reform (not yet adopted by the Government) which is part of the general policy programme of the *Gouvernement Militaire Révolutionnaire* (GMR). In its programmatic statement of 30 November 1972, the GMR declared: "A genuine reform of education must be drawn up in line with the requirements of the new policy... We must reinstate our national languages and ensure the development of popular culture by organizing mass literacy work, which is essential for development, in our own languages. An Institute of Linguistics must be established to devise ways of removing obstacles to the use of our national languages as a means of communicating knowledge".

Even if these brave words are not followed up, the fact that they have been pronounced deserves mention, for this is the first time since independence that such an eminent authority (the Head of State) has spoken

<sup>8</sup>A rural newspaper in Bariba entitled "Kparo" has just been issued. The National Commission for Linguistics is to launch three rural papers, in Fon, Yoruba and Aja, with financial assistance from Unesco.

so clearly, categorically and perceptively on the subject of the African languages. The fact that such words have been spoken by the political leader of Dahomey, and that these languages are now being taken seriously in circles which were traditionally hostile to their use, will help to convince doubters that our languages can be used for teaching. The document drawn up by the National Commission for Educational Reform in Dahomey, which met in May 1973, placed special emphasis on the use of Dahomean languages. In the section defining the purpose and the content of the reform, it rejected the idea of education for an élite and opted for teaching national languages. The document contains the following explicit statement:

"As language is both the basis and the vehicle of culture, we must work to rehabilitate and defend our cultures and lend them new lustre by introducing national languages into our educational system, regarding them and treating them as a powerful instrument of national unity. Their introduction will be gradual:

- 1) they will first be introduced as subjects, i.e. they will be taught on the same basis as others;
- 2) they will then be introduced as languages of instruction, i.e. used in teaching all subjects<sup>9</sup>."

So the route ahead has been mapped out. But there is often a wide gap between declarations of intent and their implementation: six months after the work of the National Commission for Educational Reform, there was no positive sign to confirm the noble words of 30 November 1972; the infant classes which were to be taught in the mother tongue with effect from October 1973 had still not materialized, and neither had the Institute of Linguistics, the structure of which had not been worked out in detail. However, there has been one encouraging sign: the authorities agreed to the request of the National Commission for Linguistics that the teaching of national languages should be introduced at the University and the École Normale. Thus, since January 1974, students have been able to learn Aja, Bariba, Fon and Yoruba. When this document went to press, the content of the courses had not yet been settled. The most important thing which still remains to be done is to introduce linguistics teaching and research at the University of Dahomey—in the modern world, it is impossible to consider teaching a language which has no written form without some preliminary scientific investigation. If this is not done, the impossibility of serious and effective teaching may be taken as proof that African languages cannot be taught.

<sup>9</sup>*Structures actuelles du système éducatif, op. cit.* p. 9

## CONCLUSION

This brief account of Dahomean languages and their place in education has shown what a very marginal role they play therein. This is because there has never been a carefully thought-out language policy with clearly-defined objectives and a properly planned method of achieving them, based on detailed knowledge of the situation which it is designed to change.

Experiments in the field of adult literacy work now being carried out are well-meaning if not always completely disinterested. They have undoubtedly played a positive role, but they must be accompanied and eventually replaced by the use of African languages in schools. If this does not happen, the dichotomy between African languages on the one hand and French on the other will become more marked as time goes on, thus perpetuating the mistaken belief that Dahomean languages are at best suited for literacy work while the colonial language (French) is the only one suitable for education and public service.

The reaction of the newly literate peasants of the Grand Agonvi is symptomatic in this respect and shows the problem in its true light: their insistence that they should be made civil servants once they had mastered reading, writing and arithmetic shows that they had grasped the socio-political importance of the French language as an instrument of social advancement. They have simply applied the same rule to the Dahomean languages, unconsciously substituting one for the other. Until such time as the basic problem of the role of our languages in the process of economic development (government, education, industry and agriculture) is correctly stated and solved, we shall go on playing variations on the old colonial theme without bringing in any new principles or new measures. This is the basic problem which we must have the courage to face. The renewal of interest in linguistic problems, following professedly revolutionary changes on the political scene in various African countries, is sufficient proof of the futility of the efforts made by certain people to tackle linguistic problems outside their political context. The main reason why the question of Dahomean languages is being raised now is that another language is blocking their way into the educational system. This is one of the products of the colonial system which still makes its presence felt in subtle ways in the African republics, certainly in Dahomey. The key lies therefore in the hands of those who stand to benefit from the disappearance of the neo-colonial system.

# 5 Mother Tongue Education in Ghana

Lawrence Boadi

I have from time to time reviewed the proceedings of some of the more recent conferences on language in education and, especially, those on the role of the mother tongue in the child's education. This is hardly the place to set forth details of these proceedings or even attempt what might pass as a useful summary of the views of educators and language planners on the subject. Educators are by no means agreed on every point. Despite this, one can at least isolate a dominant strand in the thinking of those who have devoted any time at all to the subject: a near consensus seems to be that the languages of the multilingual societies of Africa, Asia and Latin America should be given an important role in education, especially in the education of children during their formative years, notwithstanding practical difficulties that sometimes threaten to beset such a venture.

Some of the reasons for holding this position derive from psychological and pedagogical considerations. It is argued that since mother tongue acquisition begins very early in life, its importance in the development of the child's intellect and other aspects of his personality in early education must be profound. The slightest disturbance of this vital role by a second language may produce lasting and unhappy effects and hamper the child's intellectual development.

Then, there are nationalistic and ideological considerations. As far as possible, it is argued, the indigenous languages of a people should be an important major source of raw material for educating their children if the latter are to identify with their roots and respect their heritage.

Both arguments are weighty, and could be elaborated to bring out their force if space permitted. However, the question of how great a role is to be assigned in the education of children to their mother tongue can hardly be settled on the strength of either of these arguments alone. Very often, arguments for or against the use of the first language at some level of education have been vitiated by partisanship. Depending upon where



one's sympathies and prejudices lie, either of these stands may be accepted or rejected. Thus, against the psychological position, it has been argued that what may be desirable and convenient psychologically and pedagogically from the point of view of the child as an individual may not be best for the adult members of the community, not as individuals, but as a corporate body. Educational planning in the twentieth century must take account of considerations which do not necessarily accommodate all aspects of the individual's well-being.<sup>1</sup>

In response to the nationalistic position, it has been pointed out that it would be unrealistic to assume that the indigenous languages of the Third World can hope to compete with English, French, German and other languages of the more technologically advanced countries during our lifetime. Unless severance from the rest of the world is advocated, at least one of the world languages is a necessity in the educational process. To ensure proficiency amongst learners, the second language should be introduced at the earliest possible opportunity in the primary school. This, in practical terms, almost invariably implies a diminution in the attention given to the mother tongue in the classroom.

However one looks at the situation, the lesser languages are at a disadvantage. What is required in the present circumstance is language planning which combines idealism and practicality. Developing nations should adopt an educational policy which is flexible enough to ensure unimpeded contact with the outside world as well as promote national ideals. And sound principles of the psychology of learning should never be sacrificed at any stage in the process.

I realize that this is easier said than done. Like many aspects of development in a growing nation, the problems posed by language planning for education are considerable. To mention only one such problem: language planning of the kind hinted at here presupposes a good linguistic map showing the distribution of languages spoken in the country, their groupings based on dialectological studies, and the numbers that speak each of these languages. At the moment there is nothing approximating this in Ghana. In the absence of such information, nobody has been able to ascertain the number of languages spoken within the country's borders.

One thing is certain, that the number of languages and dialects is large. Some speculate that there may be as many as sixty; but it is not clear how many of these are sufficiently different to be regarded as separate languages. This multiplicity of languages poses serious problems not only to political advancement but also to educational planning. Granted

<sup>1</sup>W. Bull, "The use of Vernacular Languages...", *op. cit.*

the desirability of a language policy which would not sacrifice national identity and aspirations, it would have to be decided how many of the indigenous languages were to be selected for development and consequent use in the classroom either as school subjects or media of instruction in the early stages of education.

The question has hardly been adequately confronted in this country. Until recently, it was taken for granted that the traditional four languages—Twi, Fanti, Gã and Ewe—introduced in schools by missionaries in the last and at the beginning of this century would continue to represent all Ghana languages in the curriculum and in discussions of educational planning. Educators and planners had nothing interesting or challenging to propose about the so-called minority or unofficial languages. Some of them are now beginning to realize that if recent proposals on educational reform are to have any impact at all, efforts in educational language planning should be redoubled, and the list of official languages enlarged.

There seems to me to be a great imbalance in the representation of indigenous languages in the media of education at the moment. The absence of any Northern Ghana languages is a serious omission. I do not see that it is possible to fully integrate the north with the country's educational system, unless its languages (or at least some of them) are added to the list of languages now being developed for teaching purposes.

Southern Ghana itself presents problems. There are several groups of languages (not mutually intelligible with the 'big four', although they may be remotely related to them historically) which have received very little or no attention. I have in mind such languages and groups of languages as:

(1) Nzema, Ahanta, Sehwl, Aowim, and some varieties of Beno.

(2) Adangbe—Krobo.

(3) Awutu, Anum, Larteh, Kyerepong, etc.

With the exception of Nzema and Adangbe, none of these (nor many others) has a writing system, let alone grammatical descriptions or readers.

In a recent paper, Apronti and Denteh<sup>2</sup> argued strongly and persuasively for the inclusion of some of these languages in the traditional list. It is not clear what criteria would be used in selecting languages for upgrading; but, presumably, they would include such factors as numbers of speakers, geographical position and distribution, and status of outlying languages.

Most people would agree, however, that developing all these languages to the same level is completely out of the question. Such a step would ignore several important issues including the training of manpower and the production of textbooks and other teaching material.

<sup>2</sup> "Minority" Languages, *op.cit.*

While these questions are being discussed and awaiting answers, clear articulation of a rational language policy by the government is imperative. More important, there should be a machinery which will ensure a faithful commitment to this policy without necessarily being doctrinaire or unimaginatively inflexible. This latter requisite is of far greater importance. This country has never been destitute of educational language policy, not even before the colonial government firmly committed itself to educational development. What has been always missing is serious implementation of proposed language policies. It is hardly enough to declare in speeches at public gatherings and in memoranda that the country should develop its indigenous languages for education for reasons of race, culture and politics. It would be conceded that such considerations are important. But, as everybody should by now know, platitudes of the kind that have been forthcoming during the past decade in this matter scarcely provide the answers being sought. The small prestige enjoyed by some of the indigenous languages in education and other sectors of national life, including the theatre and broadcasting, is the result of serious commitment to a language policy in education by the early missionaries. The Basel Mission's success with the policy of using Twi, Ga, and Ewe as media of instruction could hardly have been achieved by an appeal to race, culture or politics. Before the arrival of these missions, there was no established written tradition in the country; and although the Arabic script had been introduced in Northern Ghana, its use for transcribing some of the languages in this region had been only sporadic, and could not have led to the establishment of a viable and competitive tradition. This was largely because the initiators of the system had little sense of commitment. One result is that, as a force in education, the northern languages are negligible.

The Basel missionaries enunciated a policy based on common sense and practical considerations; and, although they were probably not aware of its implications, the policy was backed by sound pedagogical theory and practice in that it is easier and quicker to learn primary-school subjects in the mother tongue than in a foreign language. They saw clearly that the success of the process of education, evangelization and proselytization depended largely on this policy, and were, therefore, firmly committed to ensuring its success. This language policy was limiting and unbalanced in as much as it made very little provision for humanism, which is so important an ingredient of modern liberal education.

In carrying out this policy in the nineteenth century, the missionaries had to cope with several difficulties. In addition to the limited material and manpower resources; the colonial administration was, from the start, lukewarm towards the policy and later, put obstacles in the way.

With the advantage of hindsight, the present generation naturally comment adversely on the limitations of the missionaries' language policy from the point of view of liberal, humanistic education. But it should be remembered that the experiment was on the whole very successful, as witnessed by the vast body of writings in the indigenous languages produced at the time. Equally significant is the number of scholars in the field of language pedagogy produced by commitment to the policy. Mention should also be made of the strong tradition of belief in the virtue of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction which stems from this policy. Today, some of those produced by this tradition are actively writing in the indigenous languages on a varied range of subjects including psychology, science, religion and politics.

The moral is that, given the unenviable position of the indigenous languages and the unfair competition of English in education, planners require a strong determination and an avowed commitment to a language policy which seeks a meaningful integration of the mother tongue in education. The unhappy state of these languages and their present negligible role in education are largely attributable to the absence of any clearly articulated and consistently applied language policy for schools.

Ghana is fortunate in possessing a century-old tradition of education deriving most of its force from a policy which assigned an important part to the mother tongue. The language policy of the missionaries may have been too narrow in its objectives and, perhaps, too obviously utilitarian in outlook, ignoring the culture in which the languages were embedded. But the present generation of educators and planners have an important lesson to learn from the missionaries—their firm commitment to policy. Those who believe in idealism may find their extreme pragmatism distasteful. It seems to me, however, that the case for a utilitarian view of the place of the mother tongue in education today is very strong. The familiar platitudes and occasional vaguely formulated ideals in certain circles concerning the role of the mother tongue in education need to be compensated for by much hard-headedness.

Although the British made sporadic attempts to establish an education policy in the nineteenth century, their interest in the Gold Coast was primarily mercantile. It was not until the twentieth century that the colonial administration began to show any appreciable interest in education. As has been pointed out earlier preferential treatment was given to secular schools towards the turn of the century and mission schools could claim subsidies only if they emphasized English at the expense of the local languages.

After the first quarter of the century, interest in overseas education



led to a review of the place of indigenous languages in primary school education. Between 1920 and 1925, the Phelps-Stokes Commission investigated British educational policy in Africa. One of the outcomes of its work was the setting up of an Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa whose first report (1927) recommended the use of the indigenous languages in education; it also stressed that English should be used in all schools on the grounds that the natives were desirous of learning English.

This was the first official language policy for education in this country. For the first time, recognition was given to the indigenous languages at the primary school level. In spite of this, however, the climate still favoured English. This was partly because of the immense prestige accorded English as a world language and as the language of scholarship and wider communication, and partly because of the volume and diversity of reading material available for potential learners of this language. Although the Education Ordinance of 1925 had reversed the 1887 Ordinance which required the indigenous languages to be replaced by English, it was nonetheless clear, too, that the desire to learn English amongst Gold Coasters was strong. One reason was that, with the exception of the Bible and possibly one or two books, there was hardly enough reading material in the local languages sufficiently stimulating for the adult reader. It should be mentioned, too, that up to this period it had been possible to develop and standardize only a handful of the country's multitude of languages.

From the viewpoint of the 70's, there is nothing particularly extraordinary about recommending the choice of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction on grounds of either ideology or pedagogy. However, viewed in the perspective of the development of thinking amongst colonial administrators, the adoption of the Advisory Committee's recommendation marked a significant step forward in educational policy. The change in attitude was bound to come. There was, at this time, an influential group of progressive educationists in Europe who strongly favoured the use of the mother tongue in education. Three years after the adoption of the recommendation, the International Institute of African Languages and Culture meeting in Rome expressed this view:

"It is a universally acknowledged principle in modern education that a child should receive instruction through his mother tongue, and this privilege should not be withheld from the African child. The child should learn to love and respect the mental heritage of his people, and the natural and necessary expression of this heritage is the language. Neglect of the vernacular involves the danger of crippling and destroying the pupil's productive powers by forcing him to



express himself in a language alien both to himself and to the genius of his race.

As a general rule, therefore, during the first three years of school education instruction should be carried on exclusively in a native tongue, and we consider that there is a considerable body of educational experience which supports us on this opinion. We consider that no European language be taught during that time and that it should be followed by a period during which the pupil begins to learn a European language while other instruction continues in the vernacular."<sup>3</sup>

The sentiments expressed in the Rome declaration continued to inform educational policy in succeeding years. Two decades later, a UNESCO Committee was to state this in its report:

It is through his mother tongue that every human being first learns to formulate and express his ideas about himself and about the world in which he lives."<sup>4</sup>

The assumption that education in the mother tongue should continue for three years has been accepted without question by later educationists in Ghana. Without going into all the implications of the Rome and Unesco Declarations, it is pertinent to inquire why three years should be made the maximum period for the use of the first language as a medium of instruction. I shall return to this point later.

The 1927 language policy was based on educationally sound principles, but it failed to assert a declaration of commitment or suggest an effective mechanism for its implementation. It is likely that the proponents of the policy clearly saw some of the practical problems inherent in carrying out the policy, but they were prepared to sweep them under the rug in the meantime. As it happened, the problems were merely postponed. Later educational committees were to glance at them and then drop them without providing permanent workable solutions. The practical problem of how to deal with a multiple language situation in an urban classroom was not touched on, possibly because the gap between urban and rural areas, in terms of language diversity, was not as wide as it is today. It is true that a few of the languages had orthographies; but it should have been clear at the time that even a fairly simple national educational policy, such as the one proposed, could be rendered completely ineffective in the absence of so basic a requisite as writing scripts for a respectable number of the languages in use.

<sup>3</sup>From "Resolutions passed by the Institute of African Languages and Culture", 1930, Rome.

<sup>4</sup>Unesco, *The Use of Vernacular*. ...*op.cit.*

Some of these problems still persist. Although a few more languages have been given written form by linguists and missionaries since then, much remains to be done in this area of language work before any serious implementation of a language policy on the indigenous languages can be effective.

Not much happened during the war years except that an Education Committee (1937-41) was appointed to "examine the existing educational system in the Gold Coast and to make recommendations where necessary for its modification." The Committee perceived clearly that the success of a policy aiming to entrench the mother tongue in education could not thrive solely on the people's sense of nationalism. Taking cognizance of the attitude of the Gold Coaster to his own language and of the special prestige enjoyed by English, the Committee went as far as to recommend that the mother tongue should be made one of the examination subjects at the end of the ten-year primary school course. Although this latter recommendation was not implemented then and has still not been implemented, it gave a tremendous impetus to recognition of the mother tongue as a potential tool in education. It also encouraged more serious efforts teach the handful of indigenous languages which had been introduced as school subjects through the initiative of missionaries; and, as was to be expected, textbook writers now set out to produce serious teaching material for these languages.

The Committee deserves commendation for its farsightedness. In recent months, the present administration of Ghana has announced a plan to make the mother tongue a compulsory examination subject at primary school level. This is part of a general drive to raise the indigenous languages from their current negligible position in education and endow them with a real prestige. If such a proposal were to be put into effect, it would no doubt create a favourable atmosphere for the production of much more relevant teaching material and promote the development of sounder language-teaching methodology, as did the 1937-41 proposals. But for such a step to have the desired global effect and leave a lasting mark on the country's education at this level, it is important that an answer be found for one pressing question which has been ignored for several years: what substitute will be provided for children (especially those in Northern Ghana) whose mother tongue has not been studied at all?

Another significant development during this period was the extra provision made for training in the indigenous languages in teacher training colleges. Trained teachers, especially the products of missionary colleges, were now required to be able to handle at least one other indigenous language in the classroom, in addition to their own. In such institutions as the Akropong Presbyterian Teacher Training College, where several



of these were taught, it was not unusual for a trained teacher to be able to use two or sometimes three of these languages after graduation. The aim of this provision was to facilitate the role of the mother tongue as a medium of teaching in schools.

One of the greatest drawbacks suffered in recent years by the policy of using the mother tongue in teaching at this level has been the inadequate supply of primary school teachers able to speak the language of the locality in which they work. To cope with this problem, the Ghana government has proposed setting up an intensive college at Ajumako. Not all details of the organization of the courses are yet known, but one of the proposals is for every graduate of this college to be able to handle at least one language other than his own.

Most of the discussions and exchanges on the mother tongue and its role in teaching were naturally restricted to the primary level of education. The medium of instruction in secondary schools has always been English, and there is little evidence that this state of affairs will be reversed. During the pre-independence period, the Ghanaian languages were taught as school subjects in secondary schools, but they enjoyed a much less favoured position in the curriculum than such other languages as English, Latin and Greek. However, the acceptance of certain indigenous languages as suitable for Cambridge School Certificate examinations in the thirties had an important impact. In 1938, for example, out of the 179 candidates presented by the Gold Coast, 135 offered an indigenous language.

The prospect in the post-war, pre-independence period as regards the place of local languages in education was a bright one, as can be seen from the account given above. Although not much thought had been given to the psychological and pedagogical implications of introducing English as a medium of instruction after the first three years, the very fact of giving some recognition to the local languages in education at the primary and secondary levels was in itself important. A few of the problems which now thwart language policies on the mother tongue had been anticipated; and a lot of thought had been given to the training of manpower. For example, after 1927, all teachers employed by the government were required to take an examination in one of the indigenous languages for purposes of promotion.

As late as the Fifties, some secondary schools (e.g. the Wesley Girls' High School) required every school child to study one of the Ghana languages throughout the course.

This period also saw intensive work on these languages for purposes of education. There was a very strong team of linguists and language-teaching methodologists at the Presbyterian Teacher Training College,

the most notable of these being Dr Akrofi, J.H.K. Nketia and E.O. Koranteng.<sup>5</sup>

The period which followed the war and preceded political independence was one of intense national activity, marked by a thorough reappraisal of national priorities, attitudes and aspirations. An important development in educational policy was the introduction of the Accelerated Development Plan, which sought not only to change some of the objectives of education but also to increase primary enrolment by building more primary schools and teacher training colleges. The plan stated the aim of education as follows:

"The aim of the Primary School course will be to provide a sound foundation for citizenship with permanent literacy in both English and the vernacular.

At the beginning of the course, instruction will be given through the medium of the local vernacular, with English taught as a new language. As soon as possible there will be a transition from the vernacular to English as the medium of instruction and the upper classes will receive instruction through the medium of English, except that throughout the whole course the vernacular will receive special study."<sup>6</sup>

The respective roles of English and the indigenous languages are stated clearly. In contrast to their special place and growing importance in education during the previous decades, the indigenous languages were now to play a peripheral role. It is clear from the intent of the text that total preference would have been given to English as a medium of instruction right from the beginning of the primary school course were it not for obvious practical difficulties that would undermine the implementation of such a policy.

Despite the apparently bleak future confronting the local languages, they still occupied a certain position. A sequel to the Accelerated Development Plan was the appointment of the Barnard Committee to investigate, among other things, the feasibility of using English as a medium of instruction throughout the primary school course; and, if such a step was wise and possible, to propose concrete ways and means.

The Committee did little more than endorse the proposals embodied in the Accelerated Development Plan as far as the language instruction at primary level was concerned. At this point, a curious event occurred which set back the clock for nearly a century. One of the Committee members, J.N.T. Yankah, wrote a minority report in which he dissociated himself from the proposal that the language of the locality be used as

<sup>5</sup>N. Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835-1960*; 1966 Ghana Universities' Press. p. 179.

<sup>6</sup>*The Accelerated Development Plan*, 1951, Accra.

a medium of instruction in the initial stages of education. He advocated the use of English as a medium throughout this level. This recommendation was accepted by the government, and was officially put into effect in 1957, the year of Ghana's independence from colonial rule. Thus, ironically, the year which marked the peak of nationalism was also the year in which the role of national languages in education was downgraded.

If the aim of education, as enunciated by the Accelerated Development Plan, was to foster a sense of citizenship amongst the formally educated population of the country, then the adoption of the minority report in preference to the more forward-looking majority one was a puzzling contradiction. It would be gratuitous to labour the point that the content of the school curriculum cannot be divorced from national aspirations and the role envisaged for the individual in society. The importance of the individual's role as a citizen in a nation whose population is largely illiterate in English must have escaped the government; but even apart from considerations of idealism, there were highly practical reasons why the government should not have accepted Mr. Yankah's minority report.

In fairness to the new crop of politicians in this period, it must be mentioned that, in most African countries, the role played by the indigenous languages in national life is unique and different from the corresponding roles of other aspects of culture. No aspect of culture is a greater potential source of divisiveness than language. From the point of view of the practical politician, to stress the importance of some indigenous languages in education at the expense of several others was dangerous from the point of view of national unity.

But the linguistic situation in Ghana is such that the proposed new language policy for education could not be expected to thrive. There were already forces working against it when the measure was announced. Although the official position for the next ten years was that the medium of instruction in primary schools was English, in quite extensive areas of the country, the local language was used throughout the ten-year primary course.

Such was the position when the Education Review Committee, chaired by Dr Kwapong, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, was appointed by the National Liberation Council (NLC), the military government which over-threw the Nkrumah regime in 1966. The Committee was set up in 1967 "to conduct a comprehensive review of the educational system of Ghana, that is, elementary, secondary, teacher-training and higher education." In its report, it recommended "that a Ghanaian language be used as the medium of instruction for the first three years



of the primary school course—the change to English as a medium of instruction should commence in the fourth year whilst the Ghanaian language continues to be studied as a subject; in the metropolitan and other urban areas, the change to English as a medium of instruction may commence earlier than the fourth year of the course.” The reason given for this recommendation is that “children learn more easily in their mother tongue and are more easily able to express their ideas and reactions in that language.”

Similar recommendations had been made before by educational review committees but the recognition of the different language needs of rural and urban school children was a novel feature. Although its recommendation on language in education does not go far enough, the Committee makes an important contribution which could be usefully incorporated in a language policy for schools. It is puzzling that in its White Paper the NLC rejected that part of the recommendation which dealt with language in education. Instead, it was proposed that the local language should be a medium of instruction only for the first year.

The current language policy governing schools goes back to 1970. The Progress Party government reintroduced the local language medium for the three-year primary course. The policy further stipulates the possibility of using the mother tongue where necessary for the next three years.

The foregoing outline is intended to indicate some of the landmarks in the development of thinking with respect to the place of the mother tongue in education in Ghana and to make the point that current discussions on the subject have antecedents which go back a century. Nobody should consider it original or progressive to urge the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction because others have so urged already, and, perhaps more important, the idea has been practised with some measure of success in the past by missionaries.

In the following pages, I will give some account of the current situation of mother tongue teaching in Ghana and comment on a few of the problems with which it confronts planners and educationists. I shall assume that the indigenous languages have an important place in pre-university education.

It is to be expected that most discussions on the use of the mother tongue in education should make the primary school their focus. If the mother tongue has any practical relevance for education in a developing multilingual country, clearly it should be perceived at this level.

In reviewing the current situation in Ghana, the ideal would be to avoid generalities. The position does not admit of generalizations, and blanket statements about the role of language in education are at best hazardous since the implementation of language policies has always been uneven

and desultory. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex situation, however, I shall, for the purposes of this discussion, arbitrarily divide primary schools into two large groups—urban and non-urban. As might be expected, the latter are in the majority, since most of the country's population still live in rural areas in spite of the recent drift into towns.

The position with regard to the use of the mother tongue in schools is relatively straightforward in non-urban areas. In each town or village there is one dominant dialect and this is used in homes, in churches, in market places and in local courts. It is also the dialect used by school children at play outside the classroom. In most such places there is likely to be, at most, one government department (there may be none at all!)—a situation to be expected in view of the non-urban and unindustrialized nature of these areas.

Compared with urban areas, there is considerable restriction on the movement of people into such districts. Although not officially declared, the government's policy of recruitment with respect to such places has in the past been influenced by the languages spoken by employees. The result has been that the few teachers (and possibly civil servants) who are recruited or transferred to non-urban areas almost invariably speak the local language of the area in which they work. These are micro-monolingual areas, in the true sense.

The implementation of a policy which makes the mother tongue the medium of instruction in uniformly monolingual areas of the kind just described should be expected to meet few obstacles. And were it not for the desirability of teaching a second language at some stage in the schooling process, it would be possible, and indeed very convenient, to implement such a language policy at all levels of the primary school course in such areas.

There is a gap in these non-urban schools between the stipulated requirements of policy and actual implementation. The dogma that English should be used as a medium of instruction after the first three years of primary school has never been seriously observed in rural and provincial areas, and is shown even less respect in the more geographically remote schools. Nor are such schools negligible in number. One of the inescapable effects of the Accelerated Development Plan was the democratization of education, and inaccessible areas which had hitherto been called 'bush' were to come within the compass of the new process.

The policy of using English as a medium of instruction after the first three years of primary school had very little success in the rural areas in the war years and has had as little since the introduction of the Accelerated Development Plan. In spite of the implementation of Mr Yankah's minority report, the normal practice has been for the mother tongue

to be used as a medium of instruction several years after Primary Three. One important factor favouring this trend is that, while the influx into the larger towns of educated Ghanaians of multi-linguistic background necessitates the use of English at a non-personal level, the situation in rural areas provides few opportunities for switching from the local language to English. Children find it much more natural to use the mother tongue in most situations, there being little motivation to use English either at school or outside the classroom. Nor is the situation of most rural teachers any easier in this respect: the teacher himself may feel more at home in the local language than English. Until very recently most teachers in primary schools in rural areas were either entirely untrained, or had merely attended occasional refresher courses for pupil teachers. To say the least, their English was inadequate.

The role of the mother tongue in rural schools, then, must be important. It has often been remarked that children from these schools suffer from severe handicaps at the Common Entrance Examination by which children are selected for admission into secondary schools. Their diffidence in the spoken language puts them at a disadvantage during the interview when short-listed candidates are finally selected although they may have done well in parts of the written test.

Children's poor performance in English is often used as an argument for devoting more time at primary level to the second language at the expense of the mother tongue. It is contended that the use of English as a medium of instruction should give children more practice in the language, and that, for this reason, English should be introduced as a medium of instruction at the earliest possible stage. It seems to me doubtful, however, that the comparatively poor performance of village school children either in written or spoken English at the Common Entrance Examination can be justifiably attributed to insufficient time-table space. It should be remembered that the number of teaching hours assigned to work in English in the primary schools has not been significantly reduced since the forties; and yet the standard of English attained by school children at that time is judged by most educators to have been considerably higher, although there are better and more up-to-date facilities today in terms of expertise and material resources. This is partly because there were then enough trained and sufficiently committed teachers to ensure a satisfactory teacher-pupil ratio.

The argument that more time should be given to English as a medium of instruction at the expense of the mother tongue would seem to be based on the assumption that the indigenous languages and English are not compatible in a balanced primary school course. The falsity of this assumption is borne out by the observation that, in the Forties,

English as a school subject did not suffer even though, as has been pointed out, the mother tongue occupied an important place in the curriculum.

The truth of the matter is that the Accelerated Development Plan nearly doubled the number of children entering primary schools; and although the plan provided for the building of more teacher training colleges to meet the demands of the new situation, it also foresaw the recruitment of new primary school leavers to teach in primary schools. These pupil teachers, as they were called, were by no means outstanding products of primary school education, being in most cases children who had failed to get admission into secondary schools and teacher training colleges.

It would be disingenuous to deny that, by and large, the standard of English of children from rural areas is lower than that of children from the larger towns. But it would be an oversimplification of the facts to attribute this entirely to the relatively more frequent use of the mother tongue as a medium in non-urban classrooms. There are several other factors at work: eg. (1) easier access to radio, television, cinema, newspapers; (2) greater contact with better educated people working in offices; (3) access to better libraries; (4) better trained teachers. These seem to be more important contributory factors in the disparity between the performance of the two groups of children than the prolonged use of the mother tongue in the classroom. There is little evidence that children from rural schools continue to suffer the effects of this handicap when they settle down to secondary school work. The fact that they are able to make up the lee way after a relatively short time in spite of the unfavourable factors mentioned above is a strong argument in favour of the prolonged use of the mother tongue if, as I maintain, it has pedagogical advantages.

The pattern of language use is different in the larger towns. To highlight some of the obvious differences, the situation in Accra, the country's capital, may serve as an illustration. The indigenous language of Accra and its immediate vicinity is Gã; but Gã is by no means the language with the largest number of native speakers in this area. Apart from the fact that there are representatives of all ethnic groups in Accra who may use their own language in the home, the position of Gã seems to be overshadowed and usurped by some languages, particularly Akan. As might be expected, the linguistic background of children in primary schools is varied. If it was decided as a matter of policy to make the mother tongue the medium of instruction in all primary schools, Gã would be the obvious choice for the Accra area. In the circumstance, children of non-Gã parents would have to learn Gã either at home or from their schoolmates in order to benefit from the scheme.

My understanding is that the problem likely to be posed by such a policy

would not be too considerable in the initial stages of primary school education in Accra and other urban centres. In spite of the heterogeneity of language background, Gã is used in the lower classes, and with some success. Children at this stage are either native speakers or have lived in Accra sufficiently long to be able to speak and use Gã. However, the practical problems inherent in the use of the mother tongue in such schools are progressively accentuated in the upper rungs; and it was presumably with this consideration in mind that the Kwapong Committee proposed that English should be introduced as a medium of instruction much earlier in urban areas. As I pointed out, even in urban areas, it should be possible to use the mother tongue during, at least, the first three years.

Considering the differences in the pattern of language use in urban and non-urban schools in the country, there seems to me to be a good case for operating variations of the same educational language policy in different parts of the country in place of the present inflexible and monolithic policy. Just as everyone agrees that a language policy for schools need not impose the same language in all regions, so should it be recognized that the language needs of urban and non-urban schools are different, and, therefore, the application of a language policy should be varied to suit particular area needs.

In a comprehensive, flexible educational system, the mother tongue would be used as a medium of instruction several years after Primary Class 3 in non-urban areas. Indeed, given the assumptions of the educational value of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, and taking account of the practical considerations being argued here, it would be unwise and unprofitable, in the long run, to restrict the use of the mother tongue by policy to specified levels in the course, and not to resort to it whenever specific conditions call for its use. The mother tongue would be taught as a school subject as at present, and so would English. The number of hours using English as a medium would be reduced, but not the importance attached to the language. It seems to me a myth that the longer the period spent on a subject the greater the ease with which success is assured, however indifferent the commitment and desultory the effort. The performance in English of the average Ghanaian primary school leaver hardly bears testimony to the number of years spent on the language and the prominence given it by past policies.

As I see it, the teaching of English and its use as a medium should be restricted to the upper levels of primary school wherever possible. One advantage is that there will be enough experienced teachers in the use and teaching of the language to go round. One major criticism against



the present system is that it encourages diffuseness of effort and avoidable expense.

A few months ago, the Ghana government appointed a committee, under the chairmanship of Dr Dzobo, to make recommendations for educational reform. The proposals of the committee are being widely discussed at the moment of writing. One striking feature of the report is its liberal approach. It proposes to diversify education at the primary school level in order to cater for the abilities of both the academically inclined and the non-intellectually gifted child. This is a welcome attitude.

Some of the committee's proposals on language, however, seem to be out of tune with the general liberal views and the proposed sweeping measures. The document has nothing new or interesting to say about the mother tongue, keeping cautiously to the familiar thesis that English should be used as a medium after Primary Three. No reason is offered for this. Nor does the committee show the least appreciation of the potential role which the mother tongue can play in implementing some of the liberal and sweeping proposals, or even how the Ghanaian languages fit into the proposed educational system.

In its comments on the recommendations, the Ministry of Education proposes "a gradual introduction of English as a medium of instruction after the third year of the Primary School Course." This comes closer to the view expressed above, and permits a much fuller integration of the mother tongue with other parts of the curriculum.

Two further proposals made by the Ministry should be commented on at this point. First, it is proposed that every child should be required to learn a second Ghanaian language at the primary school level. Second, as soon as possible "French should be introduced into the primary school curriculum starting from P4. The emphasis will be on oral and aural activities." The first of these proposals would, under normal circumstances, be welcome, if only because it aims at making up for the small prestige enjoyed by local languages in education. The proposal would, in addition, further the cause of national integration and help undermine ethnocentricity. It is in line with the view currently expressed in certain progressive circles that a positive way of ensuring national integration is to encourage every citizen to learn a second Ghanaian language. (Proponents of this view argue that this is a much more positive way of bringing about unity and understanding between ethnic groups than any proposal which seeks to impose a single indigenous official language.)

The implications of such a national policy, however, should be studied closely before implementation. Assuming that such a proposal is workable, the educational institutions would be obvious places for experimentation. It may be hoped that the Ministry of Education has already

considered the practical implications of its own proposal for an already overloaded curriculum. Apart from the obvious difficulty of timetable space, one may question the wisdom of making school children in very remote areas learn a second Ghanaian language which will be of no practical use in the locality while they go to school, and for the practice of which there will be few natural occasions. Other problems could also be listed; but if this is offered as a serious proposal, then schools in the highly urban and cosmopolitan areas would appear to be the obvious choice for the initial application of such a policy.

As for the proposal to introduce French after Primary Four, it must be said that although the intention behind it is an estimable one and shows considerable sensitivity to problems of wider communication between English-speaking and French-speaking countries, implementation is foreseen too early in the educational process. In the face of complaints of poor performance in English by children at this level it would be unwise to introduce a second foreign language so soon.

Very good reasons have been given why the new developing countries will need a world language for many years to come; and since in Ghana the need can be most adequately provided for by educational institutions, English will continue to be taught and used at all levels of education. But it would be a mistake to lose sight of the necessity for flexibility in the proportion of teaching time assigned to English and for varying the degree of importance of its role from level to level during the educational process. The fact of the acceptance of English as the sole medium of instruction in higher education does not necessarily mean that it should be the medium of instruction as early as Primary Three. Needless to say, the universities have a key role to play in improving practical communication through English. In planning educational policy, it is important to vary the relative importance attached to English and the mother tongue at various points in the educational spectrum, but so far it does not seem that much thought has been given to this problem.

As in various areas of education, language planning has to be related to other aspects of national life. Approximately 70,000 children take the Common Entrance Examination each year with a view to entering secondary and technical schools. Of these, about 12,000 are admitted. In 1970, about the same number took the Teacher Training Colleges Examination, competing for about 4,000 places. Therefore discounting those children who, for one reason or another, do not take either of these competitive examinations (and the number should be considerable), about 10 to 15 per cent of primary school leavers are able to secure admission into secondary schools, technical and teacher training colleges. The facts of the linguistic situation of this country are such that it is this 10 to

15 per cent of school leavers who will need English as a medium of instruction after primary school education. The 85 to 90 per cent who terminate their formal liberal education at the end of primary school will need very little English outside ordinary practical activities like newspaper reading and taking instructions in offices, assuming that office employment awaits them on leaving school. Very few of these will need to write letters in English. Most of their normal everyday activities will be carried out in the mother tongue or in one of the Ghanaian languages.

If it is true that such a considerable percentage does not need English beyond the areas specified above, then the importance ascribed to English at this level would appear to be hardly warrantable. The facts and figures would also appear to weaken any argument in support of the use of English as a medium of instruction as early as Primary Four.

The most liberal of the current views on the respective roles of the first and the second language in education advocates the use of English after the third year of primary schooling. However, if it is true that children learn faster and better in the first language, then, bearing in mind such crucial factors as the special circumstances of rural and provincial schools, and the fact that only a relatively small number of Ghanaian children are admitted to post-primary institutions, there is probably very little advantage in making English the medium of instruction as early as even the liberals advocate. The arguments for de-emphasizing English as a medium of instruction in favour of a more liberal attitude to the Ghanaian languages seem to me to be less academic or idealistic than has been understood in the past.

Granted that educational planning should take account of advances in technology, English need not have the same degree of importance as it is given at primary school level in Ghana today. This point will be elaborated on later in the present paper but assuming for the moment that it is a valid point, then it is no longer necessary to support the use of the mother tongue in education with appeals to idealism as in the past. In my view, the practical value of the mother tongue at primary level is no less important than that of English. Anyone prepared to consider objectively the facts mentioned above, and the special problems of a developing nation—scant resources and slow growth of the national economy—will appreciate that overemphasizing English in the early stages of education is unrealistic and misguided.

Let us consider the economies of most developing countries, Ghana included. There is, to begin with, the problem of producing a sizeable proportion of the food required for internal consumption. At the moment, Ghana, at any rate, is far from being in sight of this target. Related to

this is the problem of producing raw material in sufficiently large quantities to supply local industries. Another problem has to do with stimulating local industries to produce quality goods for competitive world markets. These are vital issues which are extensively discussed in the press and at public meetings. All developing countries need farmers with enough education to be able to interpret and apply the results of modern experiments in agriculture. They need craftsmen and artisans to man local industries.

In Ghana, these are going to come from the 80 to 90 per cent of primary school leavers who do not obtain admission into post-primary institutions, and for my own part I cannot see the advantage of teaching such practical subjects in English to this group of children after Infant Class 3. It should not be forgotten that their use of English after school is minimal. Add to this the assumption (which I think is a valid one) that they will learn agriculture, crafts and other industrial subjects better and faster in the mother tongue.

The medium of instruction in all post-primary schools is English. This situation is unlikely to change for years to come, not because of any belief in the inherent educational value of a foreign language as a medium of instruction at this level, nor because of the high esteem in which the ordinary man in the street holds English, but because of the practical difficulties arising from the multitude of languages in the country. In spite of these difficulties, however, it may still be argued that there is an educational value attaching to, and a pedagogical advantage deriving from, the complementary use of English and the mother tongue in secondary schools and teacher training colleges wherever possible. Some schools, moreover, in my opinion, offer opportunities for experimenting with this possibility.

At the moment, the most practicable and widely applicable policy that can be imposed by educational authorities with regard to mother tongue teaching at this level is one that requires some of the indigenous languages to be taught as school subjects. As I see it, a course in the mother tongue, if it is to make a worthy and unique contribution to the education of children in secondary schools, should comprise at least the following components:

- (a) performance in the mother tongue;
- (b) conscious mastery of the mother tongue;
- (c) conscious knowledge of the artistic possibilities of the mother tongue, including its creative literature.

Under (a) I would include the ability to read and understand the language and use it intelligibly both orally and in writing. This is what the child should have acquired before entering secondary school, assuming his

education before this period has been adequate. At this level, the first component of the course would include the development of the ability to write different types of prose; to comprehend different kinds of speech and writing which might be reasonably expected of children at that age; and the ability to summarize written and spoken texts. I would also include the ability to translate texts from English into the mother tongue and vice versa.

Under (b) I would include elementary knowledge of the structure of the language—its sound system, grammar and vocabulary. By the time he enters secondary school, the child has had little or no training in this area.

Under (c) is included the study of imaginative and aesthetic writing. The child has already met some of these forms in the primary school. At this level, the teaching should be directed towards acquainting him with the various artistic forms of the language and arousing his sensitivity to its aesthetic possibilities.

Fortunately, all these aspects are covered in most secondary schools where the few Ghanaian languages are taught. If properly planned and purposefully taught by trained teachers who are sympathetic to the development of the subject, a course in the mother tongue at this level should contribute as usefully to liberal education as any other school subject. And, it must be added, the contribution in this regard is unique.

This latter assertion needs some explanation. Not only does the child speak or use the mother tongue for normal communication; he is also capable of making intuitive judgements about his own as well as others' use of it. He is also able to distinguish between normal and unusual utterances; and, under favourable conditions, he can separate utterances which express the same or similar ideas from those which mean different things. He is able to do this because, from infancy, he has learned to formulate generalizations about the language. Indeed, he carries the structure of the language in his brain.

All this knowledge has been acquired unconsciously. The aim of the first component of the Course is to reveal to him, through systematic teaching, guidance and discussion, some of the unconscious knowledge that he possesses by virtue of being a native speaker. He learns to analyse the structures and systems of contrast by which meaning is conveyed in the mother tongue and on which is based the unconscious knowledge acquired in infancy. It is the only school subject, as far as I am aware, that affords opportunity for conscious analysis of an aspect of one's personality.

It should also be stressed that the beneficial effects of the teaching of the mother tongue can be carried over to the acquisition of skills in other



languages taught as school subjects. It is my view that the child who has formed the habit, through training, of reading critically and discriminatingly in his mother tongue automatically carries this skill over to a second language. On the other hand, if he is careless about organizing material for writing a composition in his native language, it should not surprise anybody that he is casual when he comes to write English.

Since there are fewer factors to control in mother-tongue teaching than in a second-language teaching situation, there is a strong case for giving children at this level extensive practice in writing and reading the mother tongue in preparation for work in English or French. Indeed, the initial stages of the development of language skills *qua* skills should begin with the mother tongue; and if my assumptions are valid, the teaching of the foreign language stands to gain, not to lose, from such an approach.

It is not intended to imply that the good user of the mother tongue is also a good user of the second language. The point being made here is that certain formal aspects of first and second language teaching and learning call into play the same language skills. Organizing and planning a composition, and discriminating between relevant and peripheral information in a passage are essentially the same processes for both mother-tongue and second-language learning. It might even be argued that there is a universal core of language teaching methodology. The starting point should be the mother tongue, because the learner is more fluent in it, having acquired a fairly extensive vocabulary and a wide range of expressive devices.

Unfortunately, there are several factors in Ghana militating against these potentialities. With very few exceptions, the organization of the teaching of Ghanaian languages in secondary schools is dictated solely by the requirements of a public examination. The motivation to gain a "pass" or "credit" at a public examination is overriding. Naturally, the results of the School Certificate Examinations have an effect on classroom teaching; and it is understandable that, especially in the final years of the course, teachers of all subjects (including mathematics and geography) should direct a considerable amount of their teaching effort to preparing pupils specifically for the examination. However, it must be conceded that, in addition to ensuring examination passes, most teachers of mathematics or geography or English in secondary schools in Ghana feel committed to advancing the prestige of the subject with which their names are associated and upon which the success of their professional careers depends. This partly explains why (what is not true of the Ghanaian language), the scope of teaching is much wider and the concentration deeper than what would be required by a public examination syllabus for these subjects. It is also this professional



jealousy that explains why, in the better secondary schools, a distinction is made between the *school* syllabus (which is aimed at giving a broad general education) and an *examination* syllabus (which outlines the examinable material in an attainment rather than selection test). As a rule, in the better secondary schools, work on the content prescribed by examination syllabuses is postponed till the last four terms of the secondary school course.

The position of the Ghanaian languages is different in this regard. One cannot properly talk of the professional teacher of Gã or Twi, since the teaching of these languages is very often entrusted to teachers whose genuine commitment is to other subjects. Quite a number of mother-tongue teachers are graduates; but they are teaching these languages not because they have been prepared for the job or have any special liking for it, but because either there is nobody on the spot to teach the Ghanaian language better than they; or, as frequently happens, they need extra hours of teaching to reach the minimum teaching load required by Ministry of Education regulations. The highest qualification they have, if any at all, is a "credit" or a "very good" pass at the West African Examination Certificate. This is not much of a teaching qualification, as anyone who has taken the trouble to examine the content of the syllabus will attest.

The enthusiasm of such teachers is minimal, and their indifference infectious. One of the greatest needs now is a sense of professional commitment to their subject among teachers of the Ghanaian languages. The newly formed Association of Ghanaian Teachers is providing much needed leadership, but, at the moment, the majority of its members regard themselves more as teachers of other subjects.

As might be expected, morale is low. The languages do not always attract the brightest students, and those who study them for purposes of examination in the final stages of the course do so either because they consider the teaching and, possibly, the examination, the softest option, devoid of much of the intellectual content found in other subjects, or because they have been rejected by the teachers of other subjects.

It was hoped, a few years ago, when the old Phonetics Department of the University of Ghana was reconstituted into a Linguistics Department that the latter would fill the vacuum with sufficiently interested teachers. Not all graduates from this Department, however, go into teaching, and the few that do are made to teach subjects like English (if they took an Honours degree) or history, French etc. (if their degree was much more broadly based). True, most of them teach a Ghanaian language in addition to other subjects, but the School Certificate Examination syllabuses for these languages are so antiquated at the moment that

any graduate coming directly from university to teach along the lines required is bound to feel frustrated.

At the Conference on the Study of the Ghanaian Languages held at Legon in 1968 participants saw clearly the need for professionalism at this level of teaching. In one of their resolutions, they urged "that all necessary steps be taken forthwith at University College, Cape Coast, and the Advanced Teacher Training College at Winneba to train teachers to teach Ghanaian Languages and Literatures in the schools and colleges at all levels".<sup>7</sup> It was partly as a result of this resolution and partly as a result of earlier recommendations by the linguists at the University of Ghana that remedial courses in English be provided that the Language Centre was established at the University of Ghana.

So far, the work of the Language Centre has not included the training of classroom teachers in the Ghanaian languages. With the co-operation of the linguists of the Institute of African Studies and the Linguistics Department, however, the Centre has, during its short period of existence, organized courses on the Ghanaian languages, the methodology of teaching and textbook-writing techniques for regional Education Officers.

The proposal to establish a college at Ajumako for training specialists in the Ghanaian languages is a welcome one and a happy augury. This will be the first College its kind in Ghana and, possibly, in West Africa—a college which provides *professional* training for pre-university teachers of the mother tongue.

Meanwhile, the content of examination syllabuses could considerably improved. This is most important especially in a situation where almost every motivation for learning is examination-oriented. Unhappily, the authorities have been slow in adopting changes. Since examinations in the Ghanaian languages were instituted in the thirties, the only significant extension to their syllabuses has been the addition of a literature component. Recently, as the request of the authorities of the West African Examinations Council, a group of language-teaching specialists met to make proposals for the revision of the old syllabuses. So far, none of these new changes has been adopted, for a number of reasons. One of these is the lack of adequate and up-to-date textbooks, a problem which will be discussed later.

The attitude of some headmasters of secondary schools has not been particularly helpful. At one of their meetings they decided not to count a 'credit' mark in the examination for purposes of admission to the sixth form. This is evidence of the low esteem in which these languages are held. It cannot be denied that the content of the teaching and of the



examination syllabuses needs to be improved, but it is doubtful that the best way to achieve this is by official rejection.

This is one of the reasons for the consistent decline in the number of students studying a Ghanaian language for School Certificate. It was pointed out earlier that, in 1938, about 75 per cent of the total Cambridge School Certificate candidates studied one of the Ghanaian languages for the examination. By 1961 the percentage had drooped to 51.4. Between then and 1967 the fall has been consistent: 47.9 in 1962; 44.9 in 1963; 43.5 in 1964; 43.4 in 1965; 37.9 in 1966 and 32.1 in 1967.

Other factors also contribute to this downward trend. For example, it has been suggested that there are very few job opportunities for pupils who study these languages at school. It is also likely that succeeding generations of secondary school children find the standard of teaching and the intellectual content of the course unrewarding compared with what they find in other courses supposed to be on the same level. This is confirmed by comments from close observers of the scene. Thus, Isaac Chinebuah, a linguist, former Headmaster of Achimota School and Minister of Education, reports:

"On the whole the content of the examination papers on the Ghana languages does not seem to show any acquaintance with the descriptive analysis of the languages which linguists in our Universities have made over the past few years. And it is probably true that parts of the paper are substandard".<sup>8</sup>

Comments by Chief Examiners on the performance of candidates in the examination corroborate Chinebuah's opinion and strengthen the view that the languages are a "soft option". This is what one Chief Examiner writes:

"The general performance was a little below average. It showed that the subject was not being studied seriously enough. Spelling continued to be the main setback. Candidates who wrote in Asante Twi appeared to have little or no knowledge of the spelling rules.

"Grammar should be studied more seriously, and in the language. Candidates could not describe grammatical functions in Twi..."

"The set books were better studied but candidates failed to apply the knowledge gained in answering questions intelligently. The same comments applied to the customs and institutions.

"Where candidates were asked to discuss an issue they just gave an

<sup>8</sup>I. Chinebuah, "The Examining of Ghanaian Languages", in: J.R. Birnie and G. Ansre (eds), *op. cit.*

account of the incident. This shows candidates' inability to think about the subject."<sup>9</sup>

It is not unusual for pupils preparing for these examinations to postpone revision of course work in the Ghanaian languages until the examination week, and then sit up all night to cram. Surely, there must be something amiss with a system whose products attach no value to a school subject beyond the temporary demands of a public examination.

I have been told by several secondary school teachers who have had something to do with the teaching of Ghanaian languages that quite a large proportion of children entering secondary school these days do not even speak their language properly let alone read or write it. In effect, they have never seen their mother tongue in print. There are two possible courses of action open to teachers in handling such children: either (1) a special course in reading and writing is provided to make up for gaps in their education or (2) they are completely ignored. I have not come across any school where the first step is systematically followed, although I am told that some teachers arrange private tuition for these children.

The position of these languages in education is already dismal; and it is certainly not helped by the recent influx of children who have been through institutions where no recognition is given to the mother tongue.

Most of the children in this category are products of "international schools", as they are called, situated in the larger towns and urban centres. The medium of instruction in these schools is English from the very beginning of the elementary school course, and there are several reasons for this. A few of these schools, especially one or two in the capital and in regional headquarters, are genuinely international, providing education for the children of expatriate workers and other non-nationals. For these children, the only medium of education possible in primary schools is English. The majority of the schools, however, cater for the children of Ghanaian parents.

These private institutions have acquired an immense prestige, and there is keen competition among middle-class Ghanaians to send their children there notwithstanding the exorbitant fees. Such competition is partly due to the fact that these schools give children special, though limited, preparation for the Common Entrance Examination, and partly because, or so it is claimed, slower children who would not survive the normal pace of teaching and competition in government-assisted schools receive individual attention in the "international schools".

Naturally, English holds a central position in the education offered,

<sup>9</sup>Quoted from the West African Examination Council Reports to schools.

not only because of its importance as a Common Entrance Examination subject but because of its prestige value. It must not be forgotten that most parents send their children to these schools because of the prestige associated with them—a prestige which derives, to a large extent, from the ability to speak English, however badly.

It is considered by most educators that the assumption underlying the education given in these schools is of highly limited validity. And it has been urged that either the schools should be abolished, or that the Ministry of Education should intervene to impose a minimum set of teaching requirements.

This is not the place to go into this complex situation but, at least, it must be stressed that there can be a place for genuine international schools without necessarily sacrificing the balanced and proper education of children, or endangering their chances as full and normal future beneficiaries of secondary school education. There is no reason why, if they support genuinely high standards in education, as they claim, these schools should not aim at combining depth with breadth. The performance at the Common Entrance Examinations of children from the University of Ghana Primary School is as good as any in the country; but this academic distinction is not achieved at the expense of breadth and the requirements of a liberal education. The Headmaster insists that there is adequate provision for the teaching of the Ghanaian languages and such other non-examination subjects as art and crafts, music, drama and swimming, in spite of the highly international character of the school.

The foregoing picture of the situation of the Ghanaian languages in schools is not very encouraging, and it is a partial reflection of the attitude of most educated Ghanaians to indigenous culture. But it is not completely irretrievable provided some of the faults in the organization of the teaching and implementation of policy can be remedied. I have referred to some of these and have stressed the importance of creating a core of well-informed professional teachers of Ghanaian languages, who have a basic background in language-teaching methodology to enable them to keep abreast of new developments in the field. As already noted, the problem of updating the content of school and examination syllabuses is also of great importance. Neither of these weak points in the system, however, can be successfully remedied without adequate textbooks.

This is such a central issue that it deserves the attention and combined effort of the government, educational authorities and publishing houses. Until the question of up-to-date textbook production is examined thoroughly, there is very little future for the mother tongue in secondary



school education. Admittedly, there are some books but they tend to be always the same. An obvious need in the present circumstance is a campaign for fresher books dealing with more interesting material and themes for schools. Freshness alone, however, will not suffice; there should also be variety and breadth of scope to cater for a wider reading public. Most of the existing books on the Ghanaian languages are intended for school and examination purposes.

Perpetuation of this narrow view of book production can only harm the teaching of the Ghanaian languages in the long run. It is just not enough to provide reading material for learners without placing before them the prospect of ever enjoying more mature and sophisticated reading material intended for the educated adult. Part of the serious motivation for learning English or French at school derives from the hope of using the language in situations completely outside the classroom and unrelated to examination requirements, and reading some of the major authors in the language concerned. At the moment, this important prospect is denied the Ghanaian-language learner in secondary school, and the fact may not be unimportant in explaining why few school children opt for the subject, and why even they fail to study it as seriously as other subjects.

I do not believe that there are no creative writers in the Ghanaian languages. I have met quite a few whose manuscripts are still locked up in drawers for lack of encouragement from publishers. Publishers, in turn, claim that there is not enough market for manuscripts in Ghanaian languages not aimed at schools. Part of the solution of the present difficulty would be for the government or its agencies to subsidise the publication of some of these works.

While on the subject of publishing I should make a passing reference to adult educational programmes and the special needs of the newly literate adult. I need not stress the importance of the mother tongue in adult education. There seems to me to be an important area where the publishing needs of the adult Ghanaian learning to read his mother tongue coincide with those of the child who has just left school. In 1951, the government set up the Vernacular Literature Bureau, now the Bureau of Ghana Languages, to provide basic reading materials, newspapers and simple primers in the Ghanaian languages for adults learning to read for the first time. This was part of the mass literacy drive launched at that period by the Social Welfare Department.

It was a successful programme but, it was manifestly unrealistic to expect sophisticated adults to continue to read primers and basic courses for the rest of their lives. There comes a time in the career of the newly literate adult when not even the comparatively sophisticated books prescribed

for schools are suitable. It is at this point that the newly literate adult and the intelligent secondary school leaver begin to share a common educational need. The number of Ghanaians to be catered for in this regard will multiply as the years go by, assuming that the teaching of the Ghanaian languages in schools will improve and efforts in adult education will be stepped up.

The thrust of the mass literacy campaigns has declined considerably in recent years. If the programme is ever to be revived and to have any impact, then it is important that the organizers should look beyond the provision of basic primers, and begin to cooperate with publishing houses and other educationists in finding ways to fill the vacuum in adult reading material.

At the moment the only sources of adult literacy material are the radio and television. In spite of the great limitation placed on these media by the language factor, the material is extremely important in a country where the majority of the population are illiterate in English. The adult programmes on agriculture, health, nutrition, economics, government and current affairs cannot be picked up everywhere in the country. Here again, an important problem is to bring more of the northern languages within the scope of the programmes. It would be premature at this stage to comment on current discussions concerning the possibility of mounting practical courses for Ghanaians in selected indigenous languages on radio and television. My initial reaction is that the aim is admirable and should be supported. Any proposal which aims at easing communication in national life should be welcome. This may be the ultimate answer to the limitations placed by language on broadcasting.

While commending the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation for its efforts in helping develop the Ghanaian languages and bringing knowledge to a public largely illiterate in English, attention should be drawn to its apparent indifference towards efforts being made by other institutions to improve the teaching of these languages in formal education. This is all the more difficult to explain in view of the exceedingly large number of school programmes in English by radio and television. It would not make sense to advocate the exclusion of any of these English programmes. Both the schools and the public find them educative. But it is the responsibility of the schools section of radio and television to cater also for the Ghanaian languages in education. At the moment it would appear that the authorities are adopting the usual attitude towards the indigenous languages in education.

The role of the universities is crucial. So far, their research has had little impact on the teaching of these languages and their literatures. Teachers of the Ghanaian languages in schools have often been accused of not

availing themselves of the work on language and literature by university researchers. But the criticism is unfair. Many of these research publications are couched in language which may take the school teacher years of application to comprehend. The present circumstances require that either university teachers themselves occasionally write in language not too technical to discourage the teacher, or that academic boards accept proposals for the introduction of courses in applied linguistics having a more practical orientation for the benefit of the professional language and literature teachers. It is they who will eventually bridge the gap of incomprehensibility between language and literature teachers in schools and academics, while at the same time filling vacancies in such tertiary educational institutions as the Ajumako College and the Winneba Advanced Teacher Training College.

### SUMMARY

The foregoing includes a number of observations and it would be as well to single out one or two for particular attention.

I assume throughout that the mother tongue has a special place in the pre-university education of children. In taking this position, I have not found it necessary to resort to reasons of nationalism or idealism. I believe such reasons exist and are valid but, quite apart from these, there are very strong practical reasons for urging the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction during most of primary school education. Contrary to popular opinion, the indigenous languages can be used to great advantage in educating children for intellectual as well as highly practical ends.

The position with regard to secondary schools is slightly different. Practical considerations make it impossible to use the mother tongue as a medium. But even here, the educational advantages to be gained from the serious teaching of these languages as school subjects should be clear.

Finally, assuming that material and human resources are available (and, here, I would emphasize the need for professionalism) it is essential to adopt an imaginative and flexible language policy for schools, one which does not merely exist on paper, but is consistently enforced.

# 6 The Six-Year Primary Project in Nigeria

Adebisi Afolayan

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### *EDUCATION IN WESTERN STATE OF NIGERIA*

Here we are not concerned with all matters relating to education in the Western State of Nigeria. Rather, we are interested just in three aspects, namely: the general level of formal education, the adequacy of the primary education curriculum, and the quality of the primary educational attainment, particularly as affected by the medium of instruction.

### *LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION*

Although formal education is available at all levels, from nursery to university, and although the state has a very high proportion of well-educated elements of the over-all Nigerian population, the general level of formal education is very low. For example, according to the Federal Ministry of Education,<sup>1</sup> 999 of the 3779 students enrolled in the four<sup>2</sup> functioning Nigerian Universities in 1968/69 (about 52.9 per cent of the total) were of Western State origin. In 1969, the year before the project began, there were 740,614 children enrolled in primary school. This represented about 87 per cent of those enrolled in any form of education other than in higher schools or universities. In the 1962-68 plan, the government hoped to provide secondary education for ten per cent of the successful primary school leavers—figures confirm that, for the majority of the children, primary education is terminal. Only for the lucky few does it provide a foundation for further learning.

### *ADEQUACY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION*

In 1955, the state launched a free primary education scheme. The

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Mr. A.A. Oladiji of the Provincial Education Office, Ibadan for all the statistical figures quoted in this paper. They are taken from a paper he presented at the Seminar on Population Problems and Policy in Nigeria held at Ife, 22-27 March 1971, entitled *Population Growth and Its Effects on the Development of Education and the Supply of Labour in the Western State of Nigeria since 1955*.

<sup>2</sup>This was during the war when the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was closed and figures do not include those of the eastern states, particularly the East Central State.

Primary School Syllabus of the Western State Ministry of Education states that the curriculum provides for conventional courses such as English, Yoruba, writing, nature study, gardening and health habits, civics, history, geography, art, crafts, needlework and music. However the nature of the provision made leaves much to be desired. Civics, history, and geography, for example, are not taught until Primary Five, the penultimate year of the educational scheme. Thus there is no adequate provision for fields of learning such as social and cultural studies. Similarly, although subjects such as nature study, gardening and health habits are taught, there is no attempt to present an integrated elementary science programme.

Two languages are involved in primary education—Yoruba and English. Yoruba is the mother tongue of the primary school child and English is the modern European language which serves as the language of national communication, higher education, legislature, administration, commerce, and, in sum, nation-building. The educational practice at primary school level is to both teach these languages as school subjects and to use them as media of instruction, first Yoruba, changing gradually to English as proficiency in this language increases.

#### *QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT*

As has been said, the curriculum is inadequate. Worse still, much of the already inadequate primary education is given through the medium of the English language at a time when pupils have rarely acquired a working knowledge of the language. Consequently, the children are specialists in rote-learning largely artificial facts which they do not consider relevant to their everyday lives. Thus, for example, it is not uncommon to find pupils correctly reciting their teachers' dictated notes (taken from books or the teachers' notes) on the need for, and uses of, taxes, only to go out to join their older friends and parents in agitating for the Government to print more money and stop pestering the citizens with unwarranted demands!

In the General Preface to Language Syllabuses in the Primary School Syllabus of the Western State Ministry of Education, we find:

"One of the general aims of the primary course is permanent literacy."<sup>3</sup>

But it is well known that permanent literacy in either Yoruba or English is generally not attained at the end of primary education. Why?

For English, the answer lies in the fact that every primary school teacher, with any basic academic qualification whatever (generally the old Standard Six, the Secondary Modern, the Teachers' Grade Three and the

<sup>3</sup>*Primary School Syllabus*, p. 10



Teachers' Grade Two Certificates), with or without any professional training (in 1968, there were 19,170 trained and 15,083 untrained teachers), is expected to teach English and even to teach other subjects in the language. Thus, pupils are exposed to bad models of English from teachers who normally would speak to them, as would their parents and other members of the community, in their mother tongue i.e. Yoruba. As for Yoruba, where permanent literacy could, in theory, be more easily attained, everything to discourage such achievement is consciously or unconsciously built into the educational scheme. After the first two or three years of primary school, the educational function of the language as the medium of instruction is assumed by English. The entrance examination into secondary schools is in English. The final Primary Six examination is in English; not even a pass in Yoruba is required for obtaining a certificate. On top of all this, the teacher training colleges provide no courses in the methodology of teaching Yoruba such as they provide for English; the colleges are not obliged to teach the language. The Ministry of Education has staff inspectors for English but none for Yoruba. As a result, no teacher receives any professional training in the language and only a negligible percentage have received even a perfunctory academic training therein.

The average Primary Six pupil leaves school without the ability to recognize the Nigerian flag, any awareness of the nature of his country politically, economically or socially, tools for continuous self-education through permanent literacy, or hope for any bright future in the community. He is completely alienated from his agricultural background and generally can only see himself as a failure—a person doomed to mow grass, hew wood and draw water for those few friends who will be fortunate enough to continue their formal education.

## THE NATURE OF THE EXPERIMENT

The Six-Year Primary Project is basically applied linguistics in nature, involving exercises in linguistics and education. It is primarily concerned with the question of the most appropriate language policy for efficient primary education for Yoruba Nigerian children.

The Project is involved in languages as a means to an end, and not as an end in themselves. The end is effective primary education and the means is the teaching or learning of the children's mother tongue and a second language as school subjects, and the subsequent utilization of them as media of instruction. Similarly, the Project is not interested in education *per se*, that is to say, with developing or testing a particular philosophy or methodology or technology of education. The emergence or establishment of any philosophy, methodology or technology of education as a

result of the action of the Project is simply a necessary by-product.

It was, however, realized from the very beginning that basic linguistic and educational activities might also be undertaken. From the nature of such an experiment, it is to be expected that the languages in question would be studied and analysed, that new methods of teaching would be evolved and that various aspects of the primary school curriculum would be developed. The level at which such linguistic and educational issues are tackled largely depends on the sensitivity of the researchers to the far-reaching consequences of experimenting on human lives. In this particular project, the researchers have been so much concerned with the prevention of any adverse repercussions the experiment might have on the lives of the young children involved that more and more linguistic and educational matters have been taken up. Consequently, the experiment is now concerned as much with curriculum/methodology development as with applied linguistic issues. Consequently, too, the apparatus and the personnel have been becoming more and more complex in nature. A straight-forward applied linguistics experiment concerned simply

| <i>Need for a simple experiment on choice of language medium</i> | <i>Complexity introduced by the researchers' sensitivity about pupils' future lives</i> | <i>Full complexity (language-wise) now required for a comprehensively valid statement on choice of language medium</i>   |
|--|---|--|
| Making the language of instruction the only variable             | Besides the language of instruction, making content as well as methodology variables.   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a group using as the medium Yoruba and English consecutively, and being taught English and Yoruba side by side as subjects in the curriculum, as in existing schools.</li> <li>2. a group using Yoruba-medium and learning English as a subject throughout.</li> <li>3. a group using<sup>4</sup> English medium and learning Yoruba as a subject throughout.</li> </ol> |

<sup>4</sup>The third type of group has not been introduced into the experiment.

with the choice of a medium of instruction need not be as complex as the present Project.

Paradoxically, the scientific demands of the original questions concerning which language would produce optimum educational results as the medium of primary education for the Yoruba Nigerian children now require an even greater complexity than we have so far attained. The increasing complexity of the experiment can be indicated in a table as seen on page 116

#### THE GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

**ASSUMPTIONS** The sponsors of the Project base their assumptions on the grounds briefly summarized here. These are: that the current primary education given to children is neither rich nor meaningful enough, that the provision for well-designed social and cultural studies as well as elementary science throughout will make primary education richer and that the giving of such improved primary education through the medium of the children's own first language (in this case, Yoruba) while at the same time teaching English as a second language through a few gifted teachers will make the education more meaningful and more viable.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES** The Project has four principal aims. First, it hopes to develop a primary education curriculum which is complete in itself since primary education is terminal for the majority of Nigerian children.

Second, it aims at developing materials, together with appropriate methodology, for teaching the prepared curriculum effectively.

Next, the Yoruba language will be used as the medium of instruction throughout, in order to demonstrate that primary education, when given in the child's mother tongue rather than in a second or foreign language, is more effective and meaningful.

Finally, it will strive to teach English effectively as a second language through specialist teachers, and thereby provide an alternative approach (generally assumed to be more practicable and rewarding than the current educational practice) to giving primary school pupils a knowledge of English adequate for secondary education or for the type of employment usually available to people of their educational standard.

Three major results are envisaged. First, the Project will make it possible to test the validity of the claim<sup>5</sup> that the primary education received in the mother tongue is richer and more meaningful than that received

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Unesco, *The Use of Vernacular*. . . *op. cit.*, p. 11: "It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding; sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium".

in a second language. Second, solutions to the problems accompanying the adoption of a Nigerian language, (such as Yoruba) as the medium of instruction will be stimulated. Thirdly, it is hoped that the experiment will suggest a solution to the perennial problem of how to teach English effectively to Nigerian children.

A word about the place of English in this Project. It has often been incorrectly stated by the Project's critics that its aim is to eliminate entirely the teaching of English. On the contrary, the Project aims at improving the efficacy of English teaching by setting what is believed to be, educationally and linguistically, a more satisfactory goal and by providing the right agents and tools for achieving the goal with maximum efficiency.

It is well known that the two major problems in teaching English are teachers and books which, qualitatively and quantitatively, are usually in inadequate supply. The problem of teachers is by far the greater and more serious. Whereas inadequate books in the hands of adequate teachers could be effective, even the most adequate books in the hands of inadequate teachers are practically useless. It would seem that what really defeats all the efforts being made to improve the standard of English teaching is the tacit assumption underlying the present policy concerning the teaching and the use of the English language in schools—that every primary school teacher can be an efficient English language teacher and user.

In contrast, the Project will make use of specially trained teachers of English. If the English acquired by the pupils at the end of the sixth year is at least comparable to that of pupils under current educational policy, then a cheaper and equally effective alternative to the current policy on teaching them English which is needed as the medium of secondary (and later tertiary education will have been found. Some of the promoters of the experiment believe strongly that the standard will be effectively higher.

**PLANNING AND STARTING** Four major steps were taken to solve the different types of problems concerning the setting up of the Project. First, through discussion, seminars, and papers, an initial psychological battle was won. Understandably, Ministry of Education officials and the public at large were extremely sceptical about using Yoruba as a medium of primary education in the Western State. A substantial fear was that educational standards would drop. However, the greatest doubt was political. It was feared, on the one hand, that the proposal might not be in the national interest of the Federation of Nigeria as a whole, and on the other, that it might result in handicapping the children of the state in terms of secondary education compared with children of other states. At last, however, the Ministry of Education (as well as the Ife Local



Education Authority) gave its full support, allowing the Project a free hand in adapting the chosen school for the experiment.

Second, there was the problem of money for conducting the experiment. Through the active support of its representative in Nigeria, the Ford Foundation has provided grants to support the activities of the Project.<sup>6</sup>

Third, there was the problem of providing adequate advice, assessment and direction. Here, thanks must be given to many interested scholars of education, educational psychology and linguistics in the Universities of Lagos, Ibadan and Ife as well as three training college affiliates of the University of Ife Institute of Education (Baptist College, Iwo; St. Andrew's College, Oyo; and Wesley College, Ibadan) who have co-operated.

Three committees were formed. The largest consists of all available scholars and is mainly advisory. The smaller steering committee consists of those members of the larger committee who are located at Ile-Ife. The executive committee, made up formerly of four but now five of the originators of the Project and of those most intimately connected with the execution of it, is headed by Professor A.B. Fafunwa, Professor and Dean of Education at the University of Ife, and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Project. It is advised by the steering committee as occasions arise.

Fourth, there was the problem of actually setting up the teaching arm of the Project. The choice of the place was not an easy task, particularly with reference to the location of the control group. Some of the scholars felt that the same school was ideal for the two, while others felt that different schools should be used. Even the optimum size of the Project for valid results was not an easy thing to choose. Eventually a three-stream school (now developed into a four-stream one)—St. Stephen's 'A' Primary School at Modakeke, Ile-Ife—was chosen. Two of the three streams were designated experimental classes, and the third (now the third and fourth in lower class), the control. In the experimental classes, all subjects of the new curriculum, except English, are taught in Yoruba; and the English language is taught as a school subject by a specialist teacher of English as a second language. In the control class, the new curriculum is taught under the existing language policy of using Yoruba in the first three years and English in the last three years as the media of instruction. Thus, in effect, there are two kinds of control provided: in terms of language through the three streams of the school, and in terms

<sup>6</sup>This is not to suggest that the Project is indebted to only the Ford Foundation. The Western State Government still maintains the Project school and the University of Ife provides and maintains the senior members of the Project staff. Furthermore, the proprietor of the school, has built five new classrooms for the school.



of both content and language through the fourth stream in lower class and all other primary schools in the State.

The next important aspect is the enrolment and distribution of children into classes. It was decided that the children should be enrolled as in the past and that they should then be assigned to the three streams in the order of enrolment. Although it was realized that uniformity of certain factors, for example, socio-economic background and intellectual ability, in all three streams would lead to more straight-forward comparison, the difficulty in designing and administering the necessary instruments for such a scientific classification ruled out this procedure. It was hoped that such factors would be considered during the process of evaluation.

Again, the provision of teachers for the Project was a problem. The choice of the specialist teacher of English did not present as fundamental a problem as that of the general teachers, particularly in view of earlier remarks on teacher education in the field of Yoruba. There was also the problem of the dislocation of the Project that could be caused by sudden transfers of the Project teachers.

Eventually it was decided that Grade Two status teachers of proven interest should be employed. With the active support and cooperation of the Western State Ministry of Education, the local school board and the local branch of the Inspectorate Division of the Ministry of Education, the appropriate teachers were selected and declared not subject to frequent transfers.

However, there was an initial actual classroom problem. While the English teacher chosen for the Project stimulated the pupils, those selected for Yoruba were ill-equipped to conduct interesting lessons. The Project immediately ran into the danger of being sabotaged as the few English lessons were overshadowing the other lessons conducted in Yoruba (including even story-telling and singing).

This experience emphasizes the necessity for initial training of high quality personnel—teachers, course-designers, textbook writers, Ministry of Education officials and teacher trainers—if the wide-scale adoption of an African language as the medium of education is to be successful.

## MAJOR PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### *TEACHING ORGANIZATION*

The effective organization of the teaching programme in the Project raised certain problems. First of all, the revision of the curriculum to provide for social and cultural studies, elementary science and the new mathematics, by supplementing the provision in the current primary school syllabus, implied certain other changes in time-tabling and general

administration. Consequently, in close collaboration with the headmaster, teachers were assigned to experimental and control classes and the general administration of the school, particularly time-tabling, was made flexible to accommodate the various aspects of the teaching programmes of the Project.

Next, the changes in the curriculum necessitated the introduction of new approaches to teaching the various school subjects. To meet this need, on-the-job training has been made compulsory for the teachers in the form of continuous exercise during term-time as well as during the holidays.

#### *WRITING WORKSHOP*

There is provision for an annual writing workshop and so far three such workshops have been conducted. The first (16 August to 12 September 1970) was perhaps the most difficult and most rewarding activity the Project has undertaken so far. It attempted to find a solution to the problems of curriculum, syllabus and teaching materials. The specific objectives were:

1. To produce a coherent and comprehensive primary education programme capable of providing a sound educational foundation for well-integrated future citizens of the Western State and of Nigeria in this technological and scientific age.

2. To produce the teaching materials, both teachers' and pupils' books, necessary for at least the first two years of the programme's operation (to promote the smooth running of the project into the year 1971 if not further).

3. To evaluate the working of the Project to date and make necessary suggestions for improvement.

In view of the objectives set for the workshop, it may perhaps in retrospect be said that the work actually done constituted a revolution in curriculum development. There was an overall revision of the existing curriculum and new areas of studies such as elementary science, the new mathematics and social and cultural studies were introduced. Detailed work schemes were produced for the first two years of the six-year syllabus drawn up for each main field of study. In all, five subject-panels were set up to work on the five different areas into which the Project has divided the envisaged primary education programme. These were Yoruba, social and cultural studies, science, mathematics and English. Perhaps the most unexpected success recorded was the production of syllabuses, schemes of work, teachers' guides and pupils' books in the first four fields in Yoruba.

As might be expected, the workshop could not complete all of the jobs before it. In particular, it could not go beyond the first year in the develop-

ment of teaching materials to suit the curriculum for three reasons. English versions were produced for the benefit of the control group (as well as other non-Yoruba people who might like to refer to the experience of the Project) and this required more time and work than Yoruba versions alone. In addition, existing materials were basically non-adaptable, partly because the original syllabus and the Project had strikingly different goals. The existing syllabus aimed at producing primary school leavers whose competence in Yoruba was limited and whose English was adequate for entry into the secondary level of education (English was the medium of instruction here as in the upper primary classes). In contrast, the Project aimed at using Yoruba alone in teaching all school subjects, including science and mathematics, thus making the children not only permanently literate in Yoruba but also sufficiently competent therein to live effectively in this modern technological and scientific age with this one language if necessary (as it would be for the majority of them). In addition, none of the existing course books in English was found wholly satisfactory. *Day by Day English Course* was judged by the panel to have the best first year book, but it was found to be progressively unsatisfactory. Besides, it had neither pupils' work-books nor supplementary readers. Again, each of the five subject areas presented a different kind of problem. For example, although geography, history and civics were taught in schools, there was no integrated course in social and cultural studies. The existing programme made a gesture in this direction, in the last two years of primary school when English would be expected to serve as the medium of instruction. Consequently, no materials were available in Yoruba. In contrast, for instance, mathematics was taught throughout the six years but there was no clear demarcation between English and Yoruba as the medium of instruction and teachers wrongly assumed that mathematics could not be taught in Yoruba alone.

Three very significant recommendations<sup>7</sup> concerning the effective working of the Project emerged from this first workshop:

(i) In view of the fact that the major issue of enquiry in the Project is the medium of instruction, both the experimental classes and the control class should follow the same programme, using identical materials.

(ii) As a result of the first recommendation (and also for the purpose of serving as examples to non-Yoruba speaking Africans and non-Africans who might like to refer to the experience of the Project) the syllabuses, schemes of work and (where possible or necessary) even the teaching materials should be produced in both Yoruba and English.

(iii) For the uniformity of orthographic conventions followed,

<sup>7</sup>Report of the Writing Workshop 16 August to 12 September 1970, p. 8.



the Yoruba versions of all materials produced should be edited within a single framework by one editor.

The second workshop (16 August to 10 September 1971) continued the work of the first. Its main objective "was to produce materials for the third and fourth years of primary education according to the syllabuses already fashioned during the first workshop...." Each panel was expected to produce three main elements:

1. a workable scheme for the third and fourth years (where applicable),
2. a pupils' book, and
3. a teachers' guide book.

The pupils' book in some cases would "comprise a reader as the basic text, or a picture book and as many supplementary readers as the situation demanded and the writers considered expedient."<sup>8</sup>

To provide a useful flow of information, particularly in the spirit of the Project's on-the-job training, all participating teachers were brought together for two weeks with the five panels. This arrangement proved most valuable for two reasons: it helped the teachers understand the thinking behind the teaching materials they were required to use and at the same time, it brought the workshop participants into contact with the classroom situation and the problems encountered daily by the teachers.

"The decision to write materials for two years together was based on two major considerations:-

- (a) that it is sound principle to prepare materials ahead of the year of instruction so as to give teachers ample time to study and understand the new instructional materials, and
- (b) that such advance preparation affords breathing-space for making necessary changes and adjustments".<sup>9</sup>

The third workshop (7 to 25 August 1972) had five main objectives. It sought to revise the six-year syllabus and to identify and assess the coverage of teaching materials already in production or in manuscript. In particular, the teachers in the Project were to be given systematic in-service training on each syllabus and the accompanying teaching materials by workshop members. Those materials for the first five years as yet unavailable were to be provided.

This workshop, like the others, was very successful; it consolidated the work of the Project. Each syllabus was revised and brought up to date. Precise information was given concerning the availability of teaching materials and teachers became more involved in grassroot philosophy

<sup>8</sup>Report of the Writing Workshop, 16 August to 10 September, 1971, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

and organic structure of the Project. Efforts were made to prepare most of the materials needed up to the beginning of the fifth year and solid arrangements were made for the provision of the rest of the materials to cover that year. Again, as might be expected, each subject-area panel had its peculiar problems and solutions were therefore different. For example, while areas such as mathematics and science demanded panel meetings after varying periods of individual efforts, social and cultural studies required a mini-workshop in order to supply the necessary teaching materials. Yoruba and English needed individual efforts, co-ordinated by Mr. D.A. Ologunde and the present writer. The materials were to be ready for use in the 1973/74 school year.

### *TEACHING PROGRAMMES AND MATERIALS*

From the very beginning, one major difficulty was the production of teaching materials that were attractive, inexpensive, good and sufficient in quantity. The writing workshops provided the basic initial materials, but there remained technical problems of production as well as the provision of other subsequent materials.

With the generous support of the Ford Foundation, the Project obtained the necessary machines for typing, scanning and duplicating. The most serious problem has been that of illustrating the materials. The Project could only remunerate on the basis of an honorarium, whereas the available artists often would work only on a commercial basis. The solution was found in the use of university fine arts students during holidays. With the addition of a new member to the executive committee who can devote all his time to questions of production, books and other materials have begun to appear at a steady rate.

### *DEVELOPMENT OF YORUBA*

As might be expected, the use of Yoruba as the medium of primary education has led to the development of the language. Although such a growth is bound to be eventually seen at all levels of linguistic analysis, it is most obvious lexically. In fact, when people express doubts concerning the capacity of an indigenous Nigerian language as the medium for teaching science, for example, they almost always mean that the language is lexically inadequate. However, it is a linguistic truism that no language is more primitive than another and that any language can cope with any cultural demands made upon it. The point that is often lost upon the non-linguist is that scientific terms are largely international, belonging to a domain that is not enclosed within a racial, cultural or linguistic boundary.

It is therefore not unusual to find Yoruba coping with the new lexical demands made upon it just as any language in its position has done in the past, may do today or will do tomorrow. Three methods are usually



employed by any language to expand its lexical inventory, namely: 1. the creation of new items through the exploitation of its morphemic and phonemic resources, 2. a change in the totality of the referential coverage of an existing item, and 3. the borrowing of items from other languages. The first of these methods can be utilized in two major ways which may sometimes be difficult to separate clearly: outright coinage and translation. The second method too can manifest itself in one of two ways: diminution or extension of a referential coverage. And, although the third method manifests itself in only one way, it can indicate some historical features which the other two methods cannot since, according to Rowlands<sup>10</sup> and Salami<sup>11</sup>, it can reflect three stages of

| <i>English Item</i>         | <i>Yoruba Item</i> | <i>Method</i>              |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. addition                 | iròpò (àròpò)      | coinage                    |
| 2. subtraction              | iyókúrò            | coinage                    |
| 3. multiplication           | isòdipúpò          | coinage                    |
| 4. division                 | pípín              | coinage                    |
| 5. length                   | òró                | change in coverage         |
| 6. breadth                  | ìbù                | change in coverage         |
| 7. equality                 | ìdógba             | change in coverage         |
| 8. inequality               | àidógba            | change in coverage         |
| 9. set                      | àkójúpò            | coinage                    |
| 10. sub-set                 | àkójúpò kekere     | coinage plus translation   |
| 11. number                  | nòmà               | borrowing                  |
| 12. figure (numerical)      | àmì nòmà           | borrowing plus translation |
| 13. figure (geometrical)    | figò               | borrowing                  |
| 14. unit (digit)            | ẹyọ - ẹyọ          | coinage                    |
| 15. unit (division)         | isòrí              | coinage                    |
| 16. ten (place or position) | ìdì                | change in coverage         |
| 17. member (of a set)       | omọ - egbé         | translation                |
| 18. empty set               | àkójúpò - òfifò    | coinage plus translation   |
| 19. digit                   | dígítì             | borrowing                  |
| 20. line                    | ilà                | change in coverage         |
| 21. mathematics             | matimàtíkì         | borrowing                  |
| 22. geometry                | jìòmètírì          | borrowing                  |
| 23. row                     | ẹsẹ                | change in coverage         |
| 24. rectangle               | rekitángù          | borrowing                  |
| 25. square                  | súkùà              | borrowing                  |

<sup>10</sup>E.C. Rowlands, "Yoruba and English—a problem of co-existence", *African Language Studies IV*, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1963.

<sup>11</sup>A. Salami: "Vowel and Consonant Harmony and Vowel Restriction in Assimilated English Loan Words in Yoruba", in: Afolayan A. (ed.), *Papers in Yoruba Language and Literature*, (in press).

development giving rise to the recognition of three classes of items: *unassimilated loan words*, *partially assimilated loan words* and *fully assimilated loan words*.

The Project has shown how the three methods of lexical expansion have already been greatly exploited by the Yoruba language in an attempt to meet the new demands. These randomly chosen twenty-five technical terms now being used in mathematics, presented in a table on page 125, *can throw some light on this issue*.

Of particular interest are numbers 12 to 15 where the English terms involved have each two referential concepts and in each case a different word is preferred for each concept in Yoruba and different methods of lexical expansion are exploited. *Ten* in number 16 may also be compared with *ten* (a number) which is not a new concept and for which there is an existing word "ẹẹwa".

At the level of orthography, the Project is already leading to some development. The children have shown the level of simplicity or complexity of orthography they find easiest to learn and write. Consequently, in areas where there has been a great deal of controversy such as the doubling of letters, the use of tone marks, nasalization and word-division, there is a rational and acceptable system emerging from pupils' use.

#### RESEARCH ACTIVITIES ON ENGLISH

Critics have often asked what would become of the poor children in the Project if their proficiency in English is less than that of their counterparts in the State schools using English as the medium of instruction. Fortunately, this question received attention from the beginning of the Project. There was provision for an intensive remedial English language course in the first year at the secondary school. This provision, based on recognized problems of existing first year secondary pupils, was particularly linked with the idea that permission might be sought to get all the Project Primary Six pupils capable of secondary education admitted to a school as a class.

Since to meet the requirement of providing such an intensive course needs a lot of planning, the present writer (who is the executive committee member particularly responsible for language matters) was asked to make and execute the necessary plans. A brief outline of it follows.

The provision for an intensive remedial English language course is based on impressionistic evaluation of the present-day English language experience of pupils in their first year of secondary education. It is assumed that such pupils generally have difficulties because of the inadequacy of their knowledge of English.

However, mere impressionistic evaluation is not enough. In order to



tackle the problem effectively, a scientific examination and analysis of the situation is essential. Otherwise, any attempted solutions, no matter how adequate, may be rejected out of hand by interested critics. More important, the proposed solution might indeed be faulty and inadequate.

**THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM** In relation to the Six-Year Primary Project, there are really four unknown elements. Three of the four are the precise properties of three kinds of English—that required as medium of secondary education, particularly among the lower classes; that acquired by the products of the State's system of primary education; and that acquired by the products of the Six-Year Primary Project. The fourth unknown is the best way of making good the quantified linguistic deficiency of the products of primary education in the field of English. Of these four unknown elements, the first two need immediate attention. They can be clearly identified through systematic data collection and analysis. The other two can be successfully tackled only in the future. The third is obtainable only after the first six years of the Project. Indeed better results will be obtained if the records of two or three further years after the first six are also taken into consideration. The fourth depends on the availability of precise data on the first three, particularly the first and the third. It is only then that we can look objectively into the best way of making good the deficiency.

It is pertinent to note at this juncture that there are two separate variables, i.e. and the timing of the supplementary English required, and that various options are available in respect of both. The nature of the supplementary English required can take one of three forms. It may be remedial in the strict sense of the term, that is, one that seeks to remove defects in what already exists. This implies some degree of ineffectiveness in the planning or execution of the existing programme. Alternatively, it may be developmental. This implies that the primary education programme is adequate and has been effectively carried out, but that the gap between the English required at the primary school level and that at the secondary is such that it demands a supplementary programme. Finally, supplementary English can be both remedial and developmental in nature.

Similarly, there are three possibilities regarding timing. The defect may be removed by strengthening the English language programme in the primary school or through an intensive course, either in the last year of primary education or at the beginning of secondary. Thus, data is vital before deciding how to eliminate the deficiency.

Therefore it was decided to investigate the first two unknowns (precise

properties of the English required as medium of secondary education and acquired by the products of the state's system of primary education) since they require urgent attention and considerable time and effort in order to obtain a valid description and since such a description is a vital preliminary to determining the options and timing outlined above.

Now, let us consider certain aspects of the sub-experiment.

To define the English required as the medium of secondary education we need three kinds of data, first, data concerning the books, pamphlets and articles prescribed or suggested for the various courses, second, oral and written data on the type of English used by both pupils and teachers, and third, data obtained from questionnaires and interview questions directed at both secondary school teachers and pupils. In all three cases, the data must be linguistically examined and analysed.

Five types of data are required to determine the properties of the English acquired in primary school. Data concerning primary school pupils' reading material; primary school leaving certificate examination papers for the last five to ten years; pupils' answer scripts at the primary school leaving examination; the nature of English spoken and written to and by primary school pupils; and data obtained from questionnaires and interview questions answered by primary school pupils and their teachers. As with the other set of data, these are to be linguistically examined and analysed.

**PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTING DATA** Various books, pamphlets, notes and articles prescribed for primary education and secondary class one are bought. Then primary school leaving certificate examination questions as well as pupils' answer scripts are collected from the Ministry of Education.

Three hundred samples of English spoken in learning situations by representative samples of Primary Six and 100 secondary Class One pupils as well as their teachers are taped. Then samples of written materials in English produced by the pupils and the teachers are collected.

Finally, questionnaires are drawn up and filled in. These questionnaires are secondary sources intended to supplement or confirm conclusions inferable from the data described in the two preceding paragraphs.

#### VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS

*Categorization of Schools:* Primary and secondary schools are categorized and the data collected are representative of various categories of schools. Criteria for categorization include location, size, Ministry grading, catchment areas for admission, school leaving certificate results and occupation (including further education) of pupils after leaving school.

*Linguistic Elements:* Data are analysed<sup>12</sup> according to the principal linguistic levels of phonetics, phonology, grammar, lexis, register and usage.

*Quantification of the Gap:* The precise nature and properties of the linguistic gap between the standard of proficiency in the English language attained by primary school products and the level of attainment required for secondary Class One education are identified and specified.

#### *EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT:*

As the sponsors of the Project hope it will provide a permanent contribution to the development of primary education in Nigeria (Western State) in particular and in Africa in general, the results of the Project must be carefully evaluated and validated. Here two steps have already been taken.

An overall evaluation programme is being carried out by the Specialist Consultant Evaluator, Professor E.A. Yolooye of the University of Ibadan. He has outlined the framework along two dimensions—antecedents, transactions and outcomes and variables, intents/assumptions, observation techniques and instruments, and possible criteria for judgment. In his Evaluation Report No. 1, (August 1972) he reviewed and assessed the data so far gathered with respect to antecedents, transactions and outcomes, expressing satisfaction with the Project. He noted that the process of curriculum renewal is one *unplanned for* outcome which is clearly emerging and may be just as significant as, if not more significant than the main purpose of the Project.<sup>13</sup> He has also drawn attention to the fact that “in addition, the Project is revealing a number of pitfalls in educational administration, the compilation of which (in terms of problems and suggested solutions) could be a valuable by-product of the Project”.<sup>14</sup>

At the level of individual subject areas, evaluation is already taking place. The results<sup>15</sup> so far are very satisfactory. Thus it would seem that evaluation is well under control, although its full results are matters for the future.

<sup>12</sup>The Paper presented by a colleague on the Project, Mr. D.A. Ologunde, at a Workshop/Seminar at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in January, 1973, shows the results of some work already accomplished.

<sup>13</sup>E.A. Yolooye: Evaluation Report No. 1, August 1972, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>15</sup>The paper presented by Mr. Peter Hilken of the Department of Education, University of Ife, at a Seminar/Workshop at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in January, 1973, presents one such exercise.



## FUTURE ACTIVITIES

### *CONTINUATION AND COMPLETION OF CURRENT ACTIVITIES*

**WORKSHOPS** Three main sorts of activity may be envisaged for future workshops. First, other teaching materials required for the Project programmes must be provided. Next, materials already available will need to be revised and consolidated in the light of experience. Finally, regular and constant plans for the assessment and evaluation of the achievements and failures of the Project programmes, particularly the teaching ones in the various subject areas, will have to be designed and carried out. Certainly, Ministry officials and some specialists, learned or professional societies or organizations such as the Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria, the Nigerian Union of Teachers and the Yoruba Teachers' Association of Nigeria will have to be involved in such activities.

**FURTHER SYSTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF YORUBA** One of the outstanding achievements of the Project so far is the development of the Yoruba language to meet the requirement of a medium of primary education, particularly in new areas such as elementary science and new mathematics. The development so far attempted must be consolidated. This can be done in two stages: the first stage, already begun, is that of editing and exposition<sup>16</sup> and the second is that of critical examination and re-modelling.<sup>17</sup> Both stages involve work on Yoruba orthography (particularly revision for the benefit of children) and on meta-language and technical or scientific terminology (for example, to decide which of two forms such as "sákù" and "òbirikítí" for 'circle' will survive).

**FURTHER PRODUCTION OF TEACHING MATERIALS** Materials available only in manuscript form will have to be transformed into classroom books and materials already produced will have to be revised in consultation with the Project teachers.

**FURTHER WORK ON THE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES ON ENGLISH** The collection and analysis of data already begun will have to be completed. The nature of the gap between Primary Six English and the English required for undertaking a successful Secondary One course will be identified. Finally,

<sup>16</sup>This requires a critical examination and evaluation of the edited materials together with the exposition. This means that the syllabuses, schemes of work and teaching materials should be edited. Then accompanying the edited materials should be a scientific exposition of the principles underlying the orthographic conventions as well as the forms of meta-language and technical terms adopted in the production.

<sup>17</sup>Following the evaluation, the final edition of both the material and the reasoned exposition of principles is produced.

the sort of intensive English course which would suit pupils leaving primary for secondary schools in general and Project pupils in particular will be identified, thus laying a sound foundation for establishing a workshop for said course.

**FURTHER EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT** It is hoped that scientific statements will become available concerning the degree of success or failure of the Project and its major contributions to education in general and to the primary education of the African child in his own mother tongue in particular.

#### NEW ACTIVITIES

*Proliferation of the Project* The Project's sponsors feel that it is unnecessary and in fact wasteful to wait until the end of the six years before attempting wider experimentation. The materials now being produced can easily be multiplied to meet the increased demands and co-ordination and concentration of efforts and information would be easier, more effective and also less expensive. Therefore plans for controlled expansion by the beginning of 1973/74 have been drawn up.

There are two aspects of the proposed proliferation that deserve further comments. One aspect concerns a necessary modification in policy that is bound to take place together with proliferation and the other concerns a need for a wider language involvement in another kind of proliferation which is not likely to take place immediately.

The kind of proliferation of our immediate concern is the testing out of the Project scheme in a number of schools located around four teacher training colleges, most likely the Teachers' Training College at Ilesha, the Baptist College at Iwo, St. Andrew's College at Oyo and the Wesley College at Ibadan. The first is a government-run institution and the other three are the oldest Voluntary Agency (now State School Board) institutions in the State.

However, since there is no existing pool of specially trained primary school teachers of English from which the required specialist English teachers can be selected and since we cannot expect either the financial or the human resources for repeating exactly the Project school activities, we will have to rely on the regular classroom teacher to teach English as well. Of course, care will be taken in selecting only the most promising English language teachers to participate in the proliferation exercise. To ensure that the pupils are not subjected to the traditional methodological approach which may negate the effectiveness of the instructional materials and thereby make them suffer educationally, there will be field workshops and on-the-job training for the participating teachers.

From the experimental point of view, this inevitable modification is not

unwelcome. It gives us the opportunity to test our assumption that the specialist teacher of English is the best answer to the problem of teaching primary school English effectively. Undoubtedly, in interpreting the resultant data, special consideration would have to be given to all variables involved.

The other kind of proliferation with wider language involvement which is not likely to take place immediately is necessary in order to enhance the over all value of the Project as a scientific experiment. Scholars and critics<sup>18</sup> have correctly pointed to the fact that the suggestions in Unesco's

*The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*, have not yet been subjected to any scientific experiments. In this regard, the Project is making a unique contribution. However, to meet all requirements demanded by the scholars, the Project needs another control group using only English throughout as a medium of instruction. Although attempting this would increase the problems of the Project, the present writer believes that the gains would more than justify the trouble.

*Teacher Education* Teacher training is a very important factor in the effective use of Yoruba as the medium of primary education. The methodology of teaching Yoruba as a subject or of using it as a medium of instruction is not treated currently.

Now is the time for the Project, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, teachers and the foremost training colleges in the State, to work out an adequate teacher education programme in Yoruba. Since whatever is suggested will need to be tested, the Project should include a pilot sub-experiment on the provision of adequate teacher education in Yoruba.

There are three prerequisites to the establishment of this sub-experiment: the approval and active support of the Ministry of Education, particularly important in respect of the certification and acceptance of the teachers trained in the experiment; a suitable location and detailed programme; and funds.

Although the proposed proliferation is to be built round teacher training colleges, this sub-experiment remains vital. Superficial involvement of the teacher training colleges is not enough—a full-scale trying-out of the necessary supporting programme is needed.

<sup>18</sup>For example, W.E. Bull, "The Use of Vernacular Languages...", *op. cit.*; and O. Oyelaran's "Yoruba as a Medium of Instruction", a paper contributed to the weekend Seminar on Yoruba Language and Literature, 13-16 December 1969, at Ile-Ife.



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

### *THE PILOT NATURE OF THE PROJECT*

The first thing to note about this Project is its flexible pilot nature. It is hoped that from the experience gained a more satisfactory primary educational programme for African children will emerge, starting in the Yoruba-speaking States of Nigeria, especially the Western State. This does not seem to be just wishful thinking. Recently, the Western State government's Ministry of Education has been showing very keen interest in the Project and has expressed readiness to optimise use of the Project's findings.

In the long term, it is hoped that the Project may serve as a model for other States of Nigeria. After all, it is an illustration of what can be done with an indigenous African language as a medium of instruction. This means that any other African State, particularly the West African neighbours of Nigeria who have a similar or comparable linguistic situation and experience, may adapt and utilize the findings of the Project.

### *IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN EDUCATION*

If the Project satisfactorily demonstrates that primary education is richest, most meaningful and most relevant for African children when given in their mother-tongue (even when the children belong to a multi-lingual state that may require the use of a modern European language such as English or French for national administration, development and unity and as the medium of secondary and higher education), it will have opened the eyes of all African states to a new and more valuable approach to primary education. Undoubtedly, the situation in the Western State of Nigeria is comparable to that in many other African states in that primary education is terminal for most children. It follows that primary education provides the only formal equipment for the majority of future citizens of any African state for whatever self-fulfilment they are capable of achieving as well as for their contributions towards the development of their state. Surely then, it is imperative that such primary education should be the best possible.

The evaluation report indicates that the process of curriculum renewal may well be a highly significant result of the Project. In addition, the Project is already revealing certain pitfalls in educational administration, and a list thereof together with the suggested solutions to them may constitute a significant contribution to education.

The experience being accumulated on the development of an indigenous African language for use as the medium of primary education, particularly in the scientific and mathematical fields, as well as the production of the necessary books, may serve as a good model for other similar projects,

or even for the outright adoption of an indigenous African language as the medium of primary education.

Experience acquired regarding teacher training, methodology, and apparatus may have similar importance.

Naturally, the successful application of the results or findings of the Project to any other African state will be relative to the similarity between conditions obtaining in the relevant states.

The results will be most directly relevant and applicable in a state with one indigeneous language. The more languages any state has, the more intricate the successful application of the results of the Project will be. What remains most encouraging is that any state can profitably apply the results, although with varying degrees of expectation.



# 7 The Rivers Readers Project in Nigeria

Kay Williamson

## THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE RIVERS STATE

The Rivers State is one of the twelve states created in Nigeria in 1967. It had previously been part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. There had, however, been a long history of demands for a separate state dating back to pre-Independence days, documented, for example, in the report of the Willink Commission on the fears of minorities (1958). The creation of the Rivers State in 1967 was thus regarded as the fulfillment of a long-time desire by the majority of the people of the State.

In pre-colonial times, the peoples of what is now the Rivers State constituted a number of independent communities loosely connected by trade relations with their neighbours. In the colonial period these communities were politically united in the Eastern Region with the much more numerous Igbo peoples who live in what is now the East Central State. In various ways the Rivers peoples came to feel that they were outnumbered and outvoted by the Igbo majority in the region. This is not the place to discuss the rights and wrongs of a very complex situation; it is enough to say that the Rivers peoples are united in a common feeling of having suffered as a minority under the old dispensation.

This does not, however, make them a homogeneous people. The Rivers State is a miniature Nigeria in its linguistic diversity. Although all its languages belong to the Niger-Congo family, they fall into five clearly distinct groups. Members of each group will be listed below. Instead of giving the 1963 census figures in full, an indication of the size of each group will be given by using two asterisks to indicate a large group, one to indicate a moderate-sized group, and no asterisk to indicate a small group.

**IJO GROUP** (Kwa, according to Greenberg<sup>1</sup>).  
The language group most typically associated with the State is the

<sup>1</sup>Joseph H. Greenberg, *op. cit.*, *The Languages of Africa*, Bloomington, International Journal of American Linguistics, 1963.

Ijọ (Ijaw) group. This is commonly regarded as a single language, and its speakers regard its various forms as merely dialectal differences. My own research, however, leads me to consider it a group of four closely-related languages, as follows

**\*\*1.** Eastern Delta Ijọ. This name has been suggested by C.E.W. Jenewari for a group of mutually intelligible dialects which have no common name. Three dialects in the Rivers State belong to this language:

\*a. Kalabari (Kalabari Division)

\*b. Okrika (Okrika Division)

c. Ibanj (Bonny Division)

**\*2.** Nembe (with the closely-related Akassa dialect) (Brass Division)

**3.** Biseni—Okordia (Yenagoa Division)

**\*\*4.** Izon

\*a. Olodiana group of dialects (Koluama and Oporoma Divisions)

\*b. Bomo group of dialects (Oporoma Division)

\*c. Oporoma group of dialects (Oporoma Division)

\*d. Northern Ijọ group of dialects (Yenagoa Division)

#### *LOWER NIGER GROUP* (Kwa, according to Greenberg<sup>2</sup>)

Languages belonging to this group are spoken throughout the Northern part of the state, and are related to others in the East Central State. Igbo speakers often regard them as merely outlying dialects of Igbo, but recent lexicostatistic counts show that the Ikwerre dialects and Ogbah are related less closely to the generally-accepted Igbo dialects than Standard Dutch is to Standard German, and that Ekpeye, the most divergent language of the group, is slightly less closely related to Igbo than English is to German. On the other hand, Echie and Egbema are less clearly distinct from Igbo.

\*1. Ekpeye

(Ahoada Division)

**\*\*2.** Ikwerre

(Ikwerre Division and Obio Division; Ikwerre is also the original language of most of Port Harcourt Division, though this is now a cosmopolitan urban area.)

**\*3.** Ogbah

(Ogba-Egbema Division)

- \*4. Echie (Etche) (Etche Division)
- 5. Egbema (Ogba-Egbema Division; also spoken across the border in East Central State)

*OGONI GROUP* (Benue-Congo, according to Greenberg<sup>1</sup>)

- \*\*1. Khana (Kana) (Bori Division and Khana Division, with the outlying Tai dialect in Tai/Elemé Division)
- \*2. Gokana (Bori Division)
- 3. Elemé (Tai/Elemé Division)

*CENTRAL DELTA GROUP* (Benue-Congo, according to Greenberg 1963)

- \*1. Abua (Abua/Odual Division)
- 2. Odual (Abua/Odual Division)
- 3. Kugbo (Abua/Odual Division)
- \*4. Ogbia (Ogbia Division)
- 5. Ogbogolo (Abua/Odual Division)
- 6. 'Mini' (Brass Division)
- 7. Ogbronuagum (Bukuma) (Kalabari Division)
- 8. Obulom (Abulome) (Okrika Division)

*DELTA EDO GROUP* (Kwa, according to Greenberg<sup>3</sup>)

These languages are related to the better-known Edo languages of the Mid-Western State.

- 1. Epie (Epie/Atissa) (Yenagoa Division)
- 2. Engenni (Ahoada Division)
- 3. Degema (Kalabari Division)

With such a large number of languages concentrated in a relatively small area, it is obvious that problems of communication in social interaction and in education must arise. The traditional way in which these have been solved is through multilingualism. A count of 151 Rivers men applying for a course in writing Rivers State languages shows that, including English, they speak roughly 2.7 languages each. Thus it is more common than not for a Rivers man to speak more than one language apart from English. It is not uncommon to find church services in which two or three languages are used in different parts of service.

Before the creation of the State, the most common *lingua franca* in the northern part of the Rivers area, including Port Harcourt, was Igbo,

but, with the exception of Bonny, it was not much used in the more southerly or westerly parts of the State. The alternative widespread *lingua francas* were English (among the educated) and Pidgin. Some of the larger Rivers languages were spoken by their smaller neighbours, but no one Rivers language was widely known all over the area.

In the old Eastern Region, the general policy in primary schools was to begin instruction through the medium of 'the vernacular' for the first two or three years, switching to English as the medium in the higher classes. In the more northerly part of the Rivers area, 'the vernacular' meant Igbo, both in the areas speaking Lower Niger languages whose relationship to Igbo is clear and in areas like Abua and Eleme where Igbo, although a useful *lingua franca*, is clearly a completely different language from the mother tongue of the children.

In other parts of the state, such as the Ijo area or the Khana area, 'the vernacular' usually meant the local language. In a few cases, e.g. Nembe, Okrika, and Kolokuma, primers were available and were used in the schools. They were based upon a very old-fashioned approach to reading; first the alphabet was taught, then words of two letters were practised, then words of three letters, and so on to short folktales and moral or religious texts. In other areas, there was no textbook at all; the teacher wrote the alphabet on the blackboard, and when the children had memorized this, the teacher would write up simple words and sentences for reading practice. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that most people became more easily literate in English than in the local language, although the latter continued to flourish as the medium of spoken communication.

When the Rivers State was created, the education authorities were faced with two distinct but related problems: the choice of language for instruction in the lower classes of the primary schools, and the provision of materials in the selected languages.

As regards the first problem, there were essentially four possible choices.

(A) TO CONTINUE WITH THE OLD SYSTEM This is ruled out, especially in the case of the Lower Niger group, by the very strong feeling in the state that it is essential to stress the cultural distinctiveness of the Rivers people. It is therefore unacceptable to continue to use Igbo in formal situations such as church or school in any part of the State.

(B) TO ADOPT ENGLISH THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL SYSTEM It is occasionally advocated that English should be the only language to which any serious educational attention is devoted. Advocates of this approach stress the small size of all the Rivers languages and the unlikelihood



of any of them ever developing a sizeable literature, as contrasted with the practical advantages of English, a world language. The general feeling, however, is that this alternative would, also fail to stress the cultural distinctiveness of the Rivers State and that, despite their small size, the state languages enshrine a valuable cultural heritage.

(C) TO ADOPT A SMALL NUMBER OF THE LARGER STATE LANGUAGES

Four State languages are used in news broadcasting Kalabari, Izon (Kolokuma dialect), Ikwerre, and Khana. It is sometimes suggested that these alone should be used in schools. This proposal is strongly resisted by speakers of the smaller languages, for, as shown in the listing of languages above, it amounts to creating new minorities among people who are extremely sensitive in this respect.

(D) TO ADOPT, AS FAR AS PRACTICABLE, ALL THE LANGUAGES OF THE STATE

Given the unacceptability of the other alternatives, this remains the only practicable approach. Just as the state reflects on a small scale diversity of the whole country, so this choice reflects an essentially federal attitude. The state has recently been re-organized into eighteen administrative divisions instead of five, and it is clear from the listing of languages above that these new divisions to a considerable extent reflect linguistic units. The acceptance by the Rivers State government of a multilingual approach is confirmed by its sponsorship of the Rivers Readers Project, whose aim is to publish readers in as many state languages as proves necessary.

The adoption of this project also provides the state's answer to the second problem noted above, the provision of materials in the selected languages. The view of the organizers of the Project is that it is providing materials so that an old principle, the teaching of reading through the local language, can for the first time be put into effective practice in the State.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RIVERS READERS PROJECT

The Project is essentially an attempt to respond to a unique situation by co-ordinating the efforts of a large number of people through a flexible and relatively informal organization. Its aim, as already stated, is to produce readers and supporting materials in all the languages and major dialects of the state so that children can begin to learn to read in their own language before going on to English.

The idea of the scheme arose during the very early days of the state, and encouragement from the government was forthcoming at once. A first reader in Northern Ijo and its accompanying Teachers' Notes were written experimentally by Mr. O.A. Egberipou and published



in 1968 with the assistance of the Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan. The Project was put on a more formal basis in 1970 when the Rivers State government made a grant to the Project and invited three people to form the Rivers Readers Committee. They were Dr. E.J. Alagoa, a specialist in the oral tradition and history of the Rivers peoples; Mr. O.A. Nduka, an educational historian and philosopher with long experience in the state; and the present writer, a linguist who has studied some of the languages of the state. All three were at that time members of the staff of the University of Ibadan, and the Project was attached to the Institute of African Studies, of which Dr. Alagoa was then a Senior Research Fellow.

This Committee organizes co-operation between the various linguistic communities who wish to have readers for use in schools in their area, the University of Ibadan which arranges for the production of the books, and the State Ministry of Education, which undertakes their distribution to the schools. The Ford Foundation and Unesco each made a grant to the Project at the beginning, in addition to the government's grant, but since then it has been entirely supported by the state government.

The Institute of Linguistics, based in Zaria, has teams working on two Rivers languages, Abua and Engenni. A special arrangement has been worked out whereby these teams publish readers of their own design as part of the Project.

The Project operates with the recognized linguistic entities of the state. For example, although Kalabari, Okrika and Ibanji are generally mutually intelligible, they function as three distinct linguistic communities, each with its own administrative division and each with a separate tradition of publication. A separate reader has therefore been published for each one. At the other extreme, the Ikwerre dialects differ considerably from each other, and a good case could be made for regarding the Southern and Northern dialects as different languages. The Ikwerre people, however, feel that they are one, and wish to try to create a single standard for writing; to do this, they are willing to attempt to over-look far more diversity between their dialects than exists between Kalabari and Okrika.

Special problems arise in the case of languages spoken by very few people; for example, several of the Central Delta languages are spoken in no more than a single village, where the adults at least are likely to be bilingual in the language of their neighbours. The Committee is providing materials first for the larger languages and will undertake more limited projects later for the smaller groups when these are unable to use materials provided for the larger groups.

We have so far produced readers for the first year in fifteen different languages, and our total list of publications is over forty.

## PRODUCING A READER

From experience it has been found that the first requirement is to set up a Language Committee for each community. This should represent all the dialects or ethnic subdivisions recognized by the people so as to forestall any suggestion that one group is trying to force its dialect on the rest. It should include experienced teachers, people who are recognized as expert speakers of the language, and representatives of the various church denominations. In some cases a church committee for the translation of prayers, hymns, or excerpts from the Bible is already in existence and is able to undertake new functions or to form the nucleus of a wider committee; in other cases a committee is formed specially for the work in hand.

The function of the Language Committee is to represent the general feelings of the people about their language, to agree on an orthography, to go over in detail the drafts of the reader, and to launch the final product successfully in the community. All of these are extremely important functions; the Language Committee provides the contact with the local community and guides the often considerable enthusiasm of those speaking the language into productive channels. It is of little use to produce a linguistically sound orthography and a pedagogically sound book if none of the local people know how to make use of it; the Language Committee, by working with the Rivers Readers Committee during the production of the book, gains sufficient understanding to be able to guide the wider community when the book is launched. Because of the difficulties of the civil war period, some of the earlier readers were produced without a Language Committee and these have in general been the least successful.

To write the actual text of the readers, an individual—sometimes a university student, sometimes a teacher selected by the Language Committee—is asked to produce a draft following the general outline (discussed in the next section) and using the agreed orthography. This draft is then checked by the Language Committee to see if it is acceptable; the committee is asked to check if the language is idiomatic but usually prefers to concentrate on 'correctness'—a concept which gives rise to as much discussion in Rivers languages as it does in English. The Rivers Readers Committee feels that the language should be simple, natural and close to what six-year-old children actually say; the Language Committee often feels that the children speak incorrectly and should be taught more correct forms through their reader. For example, in the first lesson the words for 'mummy' and 'daddy' are required. In many languages, what modern children usually say is 'mama' and 'papa'—but it is often argued that older, completely indigenous forms should

be used, even when these are unfamiliar to the children. The Language Committee can sometimes be persuaded to accept the colloquial forms in the early lessons provided the 'correct' words are introduced later, but it is a point that constantly needs to be re-argued and it would probably be wiser, if a new series was planned, to avoid these words in the early lessons.

The finally agreed text is handwritten by an artist in bold letters on a page which already bears the pictures, and the whole is reproduced by lithography and bound. A mimeographed book of Teachers' Notes is produced to accompany each reader and these Notes also follow a fixed pattern. A booklet explaining the orthography is also produced for each language, directed mainly at the teachers.

When the books are ready, the Ministry of Education makes arrangements for a formal launching of the book in the headquarters of the language area. The Language Committee and community leaders are invited on the first day, together with two teachers from each school in the language area. The first day is devoted to an explanation of the book, the method teachers should use in the classroom, a discussion of the orthography, and publicity for the publication. The second day is devoted to a working session for the teachers with a demonstration lesson and practice in using the orthography.

The distribution of books is undertaken by the Ministry of Education, which places orders in bulk with the Rivers Readers Project and sells the books at cost price to headmasters, who in turn re-sell to the children.

## THE PLAN OF THE READERS

The intention is to produce one reader for each year of primary school for the larger languages, and perhaps for two or three years in the case of the less important ones. In the lower classes, reading is intended to be taught first through the reader; when English has been introduced, it is intended that the higher classes should continue to use the readers in the periods devoted to 'Vernacular Reading'.

To reduce costs, a standard outline using the same pictures has been prepared for the first two readers. No books have yet been published using the second-year outline, and the discussion here will therefore be confined to the first-year reader.

We have used an adaptation of the experimental first reader, designed by Mr. O.A. Egberipou, as a basis. The pictures represent simple everyday activities familiar to Rivers children, such as fishing, cooking and eating a fish, going to school or telling stories in the evening. In some cases we have provided alternative pictures for the same lesson. There are two reasons for this:



(i) In the very early lessons, the pictures often determine the key vocabulary items. Thus Lesson 2 introduces a basket of maize (*akâ*) in the Northern Ijò version, but in Iḡanì the word for 'maize' is *mbiakpa*, which is rather long. We therefore substitute a picture of a basket of fish, which has the shorter name *nji*.

(ii) In other cases, cultural differences require alternative pictures. For example, in Lesson 19 the family eat their meal. In some parts of the State, the father eats alone and the mother with her children; in other parts, the son would eat with his father and the daughter with her mother. Two alternative pictures are therefore provided.

It would perhaps be possible, by carrying out more detailed preliminary research, to arrive at an acceptable uniform set of pictures; but, given the experimental framework of the whole Project, we have simply modified our original set of pictures where the various communities felt it necessary.

The reader makes use primarily of the 'Look-and-Say' method so that children are encouraged to read at once for the meaning with the help of the pictures. In spite of the more modern methods taught in the teacher training colleges, most teachers still seem to work in terms of the old 'alphabet method' used when they themselves went to school. When teachers first open one of our readers and see Lesson 1 with pictures, words and sentences, their reaction is very commonly 'But where is the alphabet?' It is therefore necessary to explain the new method to the teachers before they can use the book in the way intended.

Teachers who have worked with the Look-and-Say method report that it leads children to memorize whole pages without learning the principles by which they can recognize new words. To avoid this situation, we have tried to combine the Look-and-Say method with the Phonic method, which is very appropriate to the phonemic writing of these languages. This is done by means of the drill pages which accompany each lesson from the third onwards. These provide for practice with vowels, first alone and then built into syllables and words. Consonants are practised in syllables and words, not alone. Later in the book we practise tone-marking (e.g. with minimal pairs of words distinguished only by tone), short phrases and sentences based on the stories, and different forms of the verbs. The teacher is advised to make use of word and sentence cards with words written on the blackboard; again this method is apparently familiar to trained teachers in theory but little used in practice.

There is an attempt to introduce new letters and words little by little, although the general pace of introduction is too fast in most of the readers. This apparently results from the limitations imposed by using a common set of pictures. It appears that the material which was intended to be

covered in a year is in fact sufficient for two years for the lower classes.

Revision lessons have been introduced at intervals throughout the book to encourage assimilation through repetition of the new material.

An alternative method has been used by the Institute of Linguistics teams who have written the Abua and Engenni readers. Each lesson is built around a keyword which is then broken into syllables; new syllables are then constructed using the vowels and consonants which are already known. Following this the pupils should be able to read without help new words and sentences based on what they have learnt. This method is even less familiar to teachers than the Look-and-Say method, but as the teams are resident in the language areas they have been able to introduce the technique to the teachers and it appears to be working well.

### THE TEACHERS' NOTES

We have felt it necessary to write Teachers' Notes to accompany each reader. These provide guidance both for the inexperienced teacher and for the teacher who, though experienced, is used to a different approach. A fairly detailed outline is given for the first four lessons; after the pattern is thus established, a briefer outline is given for the other lessons.

The outline suggested for each lesson is:

1. Discussion: based on the pictures, with the children finding out how the pictures tell a story.
2. Reading: first by the teacher and then by the children, with the sentence rather than the word as the basic unit.
3. Drills: practice in recognizing the elements of the story (sentence, phrase, word) and in breaking them into their smallest components (letters), followed by the building up of words again from the letters.

As already explained, the Abua and Engenni readers, and therefore their Teachers' Notes, follow a different pattern. In the Engenni one, the experiment has been made of inter-leaving the Notes with the regular reader, thereby producing a Teachers' Edition. Although this presented some problems in production, it appears to be more convenient for the teacher to have everything in one book.

### ORTHOGRAPHY

The majority of the languages in the state had some previous tradition of writing dating from the missionary or the colonial period, but in most cases this was very limited in range. The only languages which possess a complete Bible translation are Nembe and Khana: these two and Kalaḃari, Okrika and Iḃon (Kolokuma dialect) have a published prayer book with hymns and a few primers and religious books; books other than translations are very rare in all the languages although there



is a book of proverbs in Okrika and one of stories in Nembe. Nembe is the only language of the state to possess a published dictionary.

In a number of other languages, attempts have been made to write books for use in the schools; some of these exist only in MS because their authors could not afford to print them, and in other cases the local printers found it difficult to cope with the diacritics required. Thus there is an Ogbia primer where the orthography requires dotted letters, but where all the dots have been omitted by the printer. A great deal of credit is due to those pioneers who persevered in the effort to write their language in spite of the overwhelming difficulties.

A count of the total publications in the various languages up to 1967 reveals the following totals: Eastern Delta Ijo 13, Nembe 22, Izon 12; Ekpeye 1; Khana 8; Abua 1, Ogbia 2; Epie 1, Engenni 9, Degema 1.<sup>4</sup>

In few cases, no previous attempt had been made to develop orthographies because Igbo was the language in use in the schools. For speakers of these languages, their ideas of orthography are conditioned by their knowledge of written Igbo; for speakers of the other languages, the earlier tradition of the language and of its neighbours influences their ideas.

In no case, therefore, were people completely without any kind of previous tradition to refer to, even though very few of the languages had a well established orthography. In this situation, we took the view that we should operate as far as possible with what was already familiar and introduce innovations only where the old system failed to make significant distinctions or was inconsistent. A subsidiary principle (overridden by the first in some cases) was that it was convenient to use similar conventions for related languages. In some cases, finally, we took decisions designed to reduce the number of diacritics, which are apt to be forgotten in writing.

When it is necessary to represent orthographically a sound for which there is no single letter of the Latin alphabet (as mediated, in Nigeria, through English) there are a number of choices:

(i) Occasionally it is possible to use a Latin letter with an unusual value, as 'p' is used in Yoruba to represent [kp]. I have never found a case of this in any Rivers orthography.

(ii) It is often possible to use two Latin letters as a digraph. A number of these have become conventional in Nigerian orthography for consonants and are used quite automatically, e.g. 'kp' for [kp], 'gb' for [gb], 'gh' for [ɣ], 'ny' for [ŋ] or [ȷ], 'nw' for [ɲw] or [w̥].

(iii) In other cases, it is conventional to use a diacritic to modify a Latin

<sup>4</sup>J.A. Ombu, *Niger Delta studies 1627-1967* (a bibliography), Ibadan University Press, 1970.

letter. This is very common for the vowels in Nigerian languages; e.g. [ɛ], [ɔ] are often represented by 'ẹ' and 'ọ'.

(iv) Finally, it is possible to use a special symbol, usually identical with a phonetic one: e.g. 'ɛ', 'ɔ', 'ɨ'.

We shall now consider the various solutions adopted for different groups of sounds.

(A) ORAL VOWELS. Most Rivers languages use diacritics for vowels. Most of the dialects of the Ijò languages have nine oral vowels which have in recent years been written 'a e ẹ i ị o ọ u ụ'. Formerly, some dialects either used only seven symbols (using 'i', 'e' or 'ẹ' for 'i' and 'u', 'o' or 'ọ' for 'u') or used diacritics above the letter for 'i' and 'u'; speakers of Ijò have now been able to agree both on the necessity for writing nine significant vowels and on the use of the subdot for four of them.

The Central Delta and Delta Èdo languages have either nine or ten vowels with a vowel harmony system of the typical West African type. Those using the nine-vowel languages have usually written their vowels like their Ijò-speaking neighbours and have agreed to adopt the same standard representation of vowels. In the case of one of the ten-vowel languages, Ogbia, its tenth vowel [ə] was formerly written as 'a'. The problem is that whereas 'ẹ', 'i', 'ọ' and 'ụ' all belong to one set in the vowel harmony, [ə] belongs to the opposite set with the undotted vowels 'e', 'i', 'o' and 'u'. It was therefore proposed to write [a] as 'a' and [ə] as 'a', so that the vowels of the same set would all be either undotted or dotted:

| <i>Set 1, undotted</i> | <i>Set 2, dotted</i> |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 'heavy vowels'         | 'light vowels'       |
| a [ə]                  | a [a]                |
| e                      | ẹ                    |
| i                      | ị                    |
| o                      | ọ                    |
| u                      | ụ                    |

This proposal was adopted because it makes possible a significant simplification in the writing system; because of the harmony, all the vowels in a word must be either dotted or undotted. If they belong to the dotted set, it is possible to dot just the *first* vowel in the word but to read *all* the vowels as dotted: e.g. one can write 'ẹnúrúza' (the fowls) and read it as 'ẹnúrúza'. This greatly reduces the number of diacritics required. This system has also been adopted independently for Engenni and Abua (in Abua the *last* vowel in a word is dotted) and is under consideration for Epie.

The Lower Niger languages generally have eight significant vowels



(Ekpeye has nine) with a similar though slightly less consistent harmony system. In general they have adopted the symbols 'a e i ɔ ɔ u ɔ'; Ekpeye also uses 'ɛ'. An attempt has been made in Ikwerre and Ekpeye to use only one dot per word (as in 'Ekpeye', pronounced 'Ekpeye'), but it seems likely that because of irregularities in compound verbs it may be preferable to dot every 'light' vowel.

One Lower Niger language (Ogbah) has struck out an independent line. The Ogbah Language Translation Committee, which existed prior to its connection with the Rivers Readers Project, had decided that it wished to avoid diacritics in its alphabet. The system finally agreed upon is to write 'h' at the end of words containing 'light' vowels, as in 'Ogbah' (pronounced 'Ogba'). The 'h' thus functions like the dot of other languages. It appears that the speakers are readily adopting this system. Although it is out of line with the other languages of its group, it has the great advantage of avoiding diacritics.

Special symbols for vowels have been in use for some time in Khana, which has used 'ɛ' and 'ɔ' in a number of publications. Following the principles of writing related languages with similar conventions, this practice has been extended to the other Ogoni languages, Gokana and Eleme.

(B) NASALIZED VOWELS. The most common Nigerian convention for nasalized vowels is to write them as vowel plus 'n', as in Yoruba. This is the Ijò convention, which can be extended to any language such as Epie in which there is no contrast of nasalized vowel with vowel plus [n].

In two languages, Ogbia and Degema, an interesting situation occurs. There are sequences of two nasalized vowels in which the second one is high (i.e. 'i', 'i', 'u' or 'u') but only very rarely instances of a single nasalized vowel. There are also sequences of vowel plus [n]. This situation is handled differently in the two languages. In Degema, a final 'n' is written to represent nasalization after a sequence of two vowels, e.g. 'utajin' [utâi] (tree), but to represent [n] after a single vowel, e.g. 'efen' [ɛfɛn] (bird); in the very few cases where a single vowel is nasalized, a final 'ny' is written, e.g. 'arujiny' [arujĩ] (rice). In Ogbia, a sequence of two nasalized vowels is written with 'ny' between the two vowels if the second one is 'i' or 'i' and 'nw' between them if the second vowel is 'u' or 'u': e.g. 'ogonyi' [ogõĩ] (kind of fish), 'amenwu' [amẽũ] 'honey'. Final 'n' always represents [n], and the rare cases of nasalization which are not of unlike sequences of vowels are marked by '-nn': e.g. 'aáann' (isn't it?).

In some Lower Niger languages, nasalization affects not only the vowel but also the preceding consonant; a stop has nasal release, a fricative is partly nasalized and a sonorant is completely nasalized. To represent

this, the convention has been suggested of writing 'n' between the consonant and the vowel of the syllable: e.g. in Ikwerre 'bekwnu' (fire), 'nsni' (ear), 'àkpna' (meat), 'èhni' (body). Once speakers have realized the significance of this distinction (it is ignored in the official orthography of Igbo) they are usually eager to adopt this method of indicating nasalization.

Khana is the only language which has traditionally represented nasalization with a diacritic, the tilde; this convention has also been adopted by Gokana and Eleme. In order to reduce the number of diacritics required, it has been proposed to leave nasalized vowels unmarked when they precede or follow a nasal consonant or when they are the second of a sequence of two nasalized vowels; in these cases the vowel is predictably nasalized. It is not clear, however, if this convention will be generally adopted; speakers of languages often seem happier with redundancies than linguists.

(C) CONSONANTS. The general tendency is to represent consonants by digraphs when there is no single Latin letter available. The following digraphs are in wide use:

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 'kp' for [kp]:                      | all state languages   |
| 'gb' for [gb]:                      | all state languages   |
| 'kw' for [k <sup>w</sup> ]:         | many state languages  |
| 'gw' for [g <sup>w</sup> ]:         | many state languages  |
| 'ch' for [tʃ]:                      | many state languages (regularly preferred to 'c' because of the influence of English) |
| 'nw' for [ɲ <sup>w</sup> ] or [w̃]: | many state languages  |
| 'ny' for [ɲ] or [ỹ]:                | many state languages  |
| 'sh' for [ʃ]:                       | several state languages   |
| 'zh' for [ʒ]:                       | several state languages   |
| 'wh' for [ʍ]:                       | several Lower Niger languages   |
| 'gh' for [ɣ]:                       | several state languages   |

More restricted are:

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| 'bh' for [β] | Ogbia |
| 'ph' for [β] | Abua  |

Echie has a set of aspirated stops in contrast with unaspirated ones; these are represented by consonant plus 'h', except that aspirated 'g' is written 'ghh' to distinguish it from 'gh' which represents [ɣ].

Many languages of the state have implosive stops [ɓ] and [ɗ]. These are traditionally written with a diacritic in Ijọ as 'ḅ' and 'ḍ', and this convention has also been adopted by their Central Delta and Delta Edo neighbours. In Èkpeye, however, the implosives are represented by digraphs, 'bh' and 'dh'. This convention appears to be working well, and



it is certainly harder to forget an 'h' when writing than to forget a dot.

The sound with the most varied representations is [ɲ]. In the Ogoni languages it is represented by the special symbol 'ɲ'. In Iẓon and Epie it is represented by the digraph 'ng'; in Ijò some rather specific orthographic conventions prevent its being confused with the sequence [ɲ] plus [g], and in Epie the sequence, which is rare, is written 'ngg'. In Echie the digraph 'gn' is used (there is no nasally-released 'g' in Echie), and in Ogbah the trigraph 'ghn' is employed (that is, [ɲ] is treated as the nasalized form of [ɣ], which is written 'gh'). In Ikwerre a diacritic is used (following Igbo tradition): ñ.

(D) TONES. The question to what extent tone should be marked in a practical orthography is controversial. The majority of linguists feel that, because it is significant in the language concerned, it should be indicated completely. Speakers of a tone language can usually be convinced by minimal contrasts that it is necessary to mark tone when it is the *only* distinguishing feature of two words or sentences, but they rarely, unless they have been strongly influenced by linguists, agree that it is necessary to mark it in all cases. They usually argue that the tone is often predictable from the context and that the many diacritics which result from a complete tone-marking make reading more difficult rather than more easy.

This is such a consistent reaction from speakers who are prepared to accept other orthographic innovations (e.g. the indication of significant nasality) that it deserves serious consideration. It can of course be replied that literate speakers are much influenced by seeing English written without tone-marks and fail to realize the distinction between a non-tone language like English and a tone language like their own. But it is also observable that it takes much longer to teach a speaker of one of these languages to mark tone than to learn to write any other distinctive entity of the language; two or even three weeks of regular practice are usually required to achieve really accurate tone-marking, as opposed to a couple of days for vowels, consonants or nasalization. Even when people have learnt to *write* tone, they often do not *read* it; it is common to find people misreading a tone-marked text even when they are familiar with the symbols, apparently because they are simply ignoring the tone-marks. One reason for this is probably that too many diacritics for comfort are being piled up; to take an extreme example, the Kalabari word 'bíbí' (mouth) has, if tone-marked, six diacritics for four letters.

We have not yet discovered the ideal answer to the problems of tone-marking, and our approach is of necessity experimental. I shall here describe some major approaches that have been made, together with



such observations as may be of interest to those grappling with similar problems.

(i) *Complete tone-marking of every syllable, leaving the most common tone unmarked.* This seems to be relatively successful with three-tone languages where there is not much change of tone in grammatical contexts. It is perhaps not an accident that Yoruba, a language of this type, is the Nigerian language in which tone is most consistently marked. In the Rivers State, Khana and Gokana are of this type, and it is my impression that speakers of these languages quickly grasp the necessity for tone-marking and learn it fairly easily. As in Yoruba, we have left the mid tone unmarked and marked the high and the low tones.

This has also been tried with two Lower Niger languages, Ikwerre and Ekpeye, leaving the high tone unmarked and marking low, downstepped high and fall. In this case it is much less successful, to judge from a few spontaneous reaction among speakers of the language. Some reasons for this can be suggested.

a) There are far fewer minimal pairs of lexical items distinguished by tone alone than in Khana and Gokana.

b) There are far more tone changes due to grammatical contexts; if we write the tones as they actually sound, the same word will have different tones in different contexts.

c) In Ikwerre, tone patterns differ quite markedly between one dialect and another, so that what is a statement in one dialect is a question in another. Marking the complete tones of any one dialect will be at best useless and at worst misleading for speakers of another dialect.

(ii) *Tone-marking of isolated words but not of sentences except for items which are ambiguous even in context.* This is being tried in our forthcoming reader for Echie, another Lower Niger language. In the drills, isolated words are tone-marked, but the same words are in most cases left unmarked in a sentence. The intention is that speakers should learn how to mark tones so that they can do it whenever it is necessary to clarify an otherwise ambiguous passage, but they need not do it in other cases. An exception is made for a few common words which are always ambiguous even in a sentence, e.g. 'm' (my) and 'm̄' (that), 'ya' (his) and 'yà' (the); these can be learnt with the tone-mark as part of the writing of the word.

A possible disadvantage of this method is that the same word will be written differently in isolation (with tone-marks) and in sentences (normally without tone-marks).

(iii) *Tone-marking of only the words which form part of minimal tone pairs.* This system was used in the old *Okrika primer* by W. W. Peters and has been retained in our *Okrika reader*. We have also tried it in

Ogbah where the Language Committee is opposed to diacritics, and in Eleme, which has an inadequately studied three-tone system; it has rather longer words and apparently fewer minimal pairs than Khana or Gokana.

(iv) *Tone-marking of the first word of a tone group, which largely determines the tone pattern of the following words in the group.* This system has been tried in Kalabari and Ibanì as an attempt to reflect the structure of the language. It involves analysing a sentence into its parts (e.g. subject, adverbial, verb phrase, etc.), which has proved to be difficult for speakers to do at a conscious level although it is undoubtedly what they do at a 'deep', sub-conscious level. It also causes a word to be written differently when it occurs initially (or in isolation) and when it occurs non-initially in a tone group. Although attractive in theory, this must probably be reckoned a failure in practice.

(v) *Indicating only tone patterns which are of grammatical significance.* This has been tried in Egenni and Abua. For example, in Abua the negative is expressed by a tone change in the verb. This is indicated by the use of a slanting line, thus:

|          |                   |
|----------|-------------------|
| Mì rakì  | (I am going)      |
| Mì ra/kì | (I am not going). |

This seems to work well; it may perhaps be compared to the use in English of punctuation to indicate the grammatical structure of the sentence and thus indirectly the intonation.

## APPRAISAL

The Project has achieved a certain amount of success. We have so far published the following:

1. First-year readers in 15 languages
2. Teachers' Notes in 14 languages
3. Booklets on the orthography of 11 languages
4. One Occasional Publication (in a series is intended to provide further reading materials outside the actual readers).
5. Three sets of alphabet charts.

The Project has aroused a good deal of interest in the various language areas of the state, and at the local level enjoys considerable support.

We have not yet, however, achieved the aim of the Project, which is to have every child learning to read *first* in his or her own language.

The reasons appear to be the following:

- (i) Although 'Vernacular' is in theory included on the time-table, it is not a subject that has in the past been accorded much importance. Teachers have therefore concentrated much more on the teaching of English.



(ii) This attitude was reinforced in former times when the 'Vernacular' on the timeable was often a different language from the child's mother tongue. Although this is no longer the case, the old attitudes have not yet seriously changed.

(iii) In Teacher Training Colleges the future teachers are taught how to handle the teaching of English, but *not* the teaching of the mother tongue.

(iv) Teachers have had very little, if any, practice in writing their own language, let alone teaching it.

(v) We have normally produced our readers in a revised orthography. Although we have produced a booklet in most cases to explain the principles followed, teachers need time and *practice* in order to become familiar with the revised orthography.

As a result of these problems, teachers are happy to see books produced in their own language but are not yet equipped to make proper use of them. Our conferences for teachers serve a useful purpose in introducing the books to the public, but are not long or intensive enough for the majority of teachers. In any case, only two or three teachers can be invited from each school.

If, therefore these books are to be as effective as they should be, teachers will have to be trained to use them by in-service courses for those who are already teaching and by the introduction of Mother Tongue Teaching Method in the teacher training colleges.

As a result of the lack of effective use, the books are not being bought as they should be. Our advice to schools has been that for the first year every child in every class should buy the first reader. The general level of sales is, however, much below our expectations, and we have large stocks of unsold books.

Part of the problem is a problem of distribution; packets of books are bulky and fragile things and there have been serious problems in organizing their transport to the Divisional headquarters which are supposed to serve as the supply centres. As a result of the poor sales and of rapidly rising printing costs, the Project remains in need of financial subsidy at a time when we had hoped that we would finance the production of new books from the sales of the old ones.

Hitherto the chief emphasis of the Project has been on publishing books. We cannot, however, claim that the *aims* of the Project have been fulfilled until we can see the books being effectively used in the schools. It is clearly impossible for a committee based at Ibadan to do this; it can only be done through enlargement of the scope of the Project.

This would require, first, the appointment of a person qualified in linguistics and education to work in Port Harcourt and undertake the

day-to-day running of the Project, the distribution and sales of the readers, and contact with the schools. It would, secondly, entail the introduction of the Mother Tongue Method in the teacher training colleges and of regular in-service training for teachers already in the schools. A policy of this type would require major decisions and a dynamic lead from the Ministry of Education.

It would, finally, be desirable if an evaluation of the Project could be carried out by specialists qualified to do it from, for example, the Department of Education of the University of Ibadan.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT

There are two major conclusions that can be drawn from the Project. One is that it is not impossible, as is sometimes thought, to use even small languages in primary education if there is a willingness to devote a certain amount of time and effort to it. It is far easier to provide for twenty small languages as part of a co-ordinated project than to cater for four or five of them with completely separate organizations.<sup>1</sup> The experience gained on this project could well be applied to other multi-lingual areas in Nigeria or elsewhere in West Africa.

The second conclusion is that a project of this kind can only succeed if it has the active support and encouragement of both the government and the people in the area concerned. The Rivers State government has, after due consideration of the particular language situation of the State, decided that a multilingual approach is desirable. This decision has led it to its very enlightened policy on the importance of encouraging the use of the mother tongue in primary education, a policy which could well serve as an example to other governments.

<sup>5</sup>The Project has so far been supported as follows:

|      |                         |               |                       |
|------|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1970 | Rivers State Government | £3,000        | Initial grant         |
| 1970 | Unesco                  | 1,072         |                       |
| 1970 | Ford Foundation         | 1,357         |                       |
| 1971 | Rivers State Government | 500           | Teachers' Conferences |
| 1971 | Rivers State Government | 1,500         | Subvention for 1971   |
|      |                         | <u>£7,429</u> |                       |

Other income is derived from the sale of books.















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